

*BUFFY, BALLADS, AND
BAD GUYS WHO SING*

MUSIC IN THE WORLDS
OF JOSS WHEDON

Edited by
Kendra Preston Leonard



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FOREWORD

Music in the Key of Whedon

Rhonda V. Wilcox



One of the most important scenes in Joss Whedon's *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is Buffy's fifth-season death, her sacrifice of herself to save her sister and the world in the episode called "The Gift" (B5.22). By dint of superheroic efforts to avoid being spoiled (my only experience with superheroism), I came to this episode without knowledge of the ending—and when I saw it, I wept. Of course, I cry every time I see that scene, and I have many companions (scattered across the globe) in that response. It is memorably notable that in these moments of extreme emotional power for the series, Whedon interwove his words with Christophe Beck's score.

As I was writing the sentences above, I struggled with the fact that I wrote that I "saw" the scene. I considered using the word "experienced" instead, but that would not have been a transparent term; it would have called attention to itself. Our term of default is to "see" television. It is important that we experience television (and film) visually, but the experience through sound is equally important (at least since *The Jazz Singer*). In an essay on aesthetics for Stacey Abbott's *Cult TV Book*,¹ I have tried to help make the case for sound and music as integral to the "viewing" experience. In this volume, editor Kendra Preston Leonard and the contributors participate in making that case by examining an important set of examples from the works of Joss Whedon.



FOREWORD

In that scene from “The Gift,” Buffy and her sister Dawn stand at the top of a metal tower placed near the hole between worlds—a glowing hole that will rip our world apart; a hole that has been opened by blood, and that only blood can close. When Dawn tries to offer her life, Buffy prevents her. Buffy will dive to her death in her sister’s place. “Listen to me—please—there’s not a lot of time—listen,” Buffy pleads. But as Dawn listens, we who view hear only Christophe Beck’s extraordinary orchestral score. Its elevation lifts us as Buffy falls. The music is the emotional key to the scene. It is only after she begins her fall and meets her death that we hear her next words. Thus we hear Buffy’s last words *after* her death, when they are even more poignant than they would have been when she first spoke them. That Whedon was able to trust so much of this scene to Christophe Beck’s music affirms the quality of Beck’s own art. As Whedon says, “I have people with whom I trust my artistic *life*.”²

Part of the key, then, to Whedon’s work is his use of genuine collaboration. Matthew Mills, in this volume, emphasizes the fact that Beck and others (such as Thomas Wanker and Robert J. Kral) who wrote the musical scores for the episodes of Whedon’s series collaborated among each other, as well. But music in the Whedonverses is by no means limited to the series’ scores. Sound and music are significant in Whedon’s works from the level of the multiepisode leitmotifs and symphonic climaxes to the subtlest, tiniest sounds. In *Buffy*’s “The Body” (5.16), which has no non-diegetic music, the sound of wind chimes gives a heartbreaking beauty in death; the distant notes of a horn (a student practicing scales) intimate the normality that still exists somewhere. In contrast, the Nerf Herder theme song is gloriously loud, and full of suggestive implications for gender and genre.³ Individual episode openings have their own strengths. The opening melodic percussion of “Passion” (B2.17), a story of love and death, could allude to thunder or a heartbeat. And then there are the endings: the punk vampire Spike blares his own vocals over a version of “My Way” (Frank Sinatra covered by Sid Vicious out of Gary Oldham) as he leaves town after wrecking lives in “Lovers Walk” (B3.8). (How many levels of allusion ripely grow there?) Wordless, elegiac vocals and strings contrast with the slow-motion violence of the battle scene of “The Wish” (B3.9)—the diegetic sounds disappear after we watch the death of Angel—and the music carries us on through the deaths of Xan-

der, Willow, and Buffy (in an altered world of magic gone wrong). Sound plays (and plays) after the narrative visuals have stopped: as we see the words “Executive Producer Joss Whedon,” we hear Xander’s “oops” at the end of “Pangs” (B4.8) and Principal Snyder’s “What is it? Avant garde?” at the end of “The Puppet Show” (1.9). We also still hear words after the characters’ mouths have closed, à la Steven Soderbergh’s *The Limey*, in the emotionally fraught “The Body” and the dream episode “Restless” (B4.22, in which we get a glimpse of Beck at the piano). To move from small to large again, there is, of course, the work of music supervisor John King, who used songs both as non-diegetic music and diegetic music, with performers at Buffy’s hangout The Bronze.⁴ These ranged from excellent but less-known groups such as K’s Choice (whose first verse for “Virgin State of Mind” could form an epigraph for this essay) to Cibo Matto, with Sean Lennon (“When She Was Bad,” B2.1) to Aimee Mann (“Sleeper” 7.8). The Joss Whedon / Angie Hart song that opens the Jane Espenson / Drew Goddard episode “Conversations with Dead People” in some senses structures the whole episode (as I have argued elsewhere).⁵ I have yet to mention “Once More, With Feeling,” the entire musical episode Whedon wrote for the series (though many critics, including Cynthia Masson and Jeffrey Middents in this book, have examined it at length). An episode known for lack of speech is full of sound: Within this one episode called “Hush” (B4.10), the levels of complexity vary from humming, to nursery songs, to a scratchy recording of *Danse macabre*, to the living symphonic sound of a score intertwined with blowing wind. Beck often enlivened the synthesizer sound with the inclusion of live performance by a few key instruments at significant moments. And as seriously as he took his work, he managed to use parody delightfully in moments such as the dramatic horns of rescue played while Xander, Anya, and Willow pedal furiously on bicycles in “Pangs” (B4.8). He even clearly mocked himself in the contrasting story lines in “The Zeppo” (B3.13), with Xander’s story line in harried, humorous pizzicato strings, while the Buffy/Angel love music, ever so slightly overblown, is interrupted by the sound of Xander clearing his throat.

It would be too easy to continue to dwell on *Buffy*, but Whedon’s other works show similar excellence in music. *Angel* may perhaps be most similar to *Buffy* in its emphasis on cinematic scores. Though there is not

FOREWORD

an equivalent sequence of diegetic band performances (as with *Buffy's* The Bronze), there is, if anything, more of an emphasis on performance (as critics such as Janet K. Halfyard⁶ and Matthew Mills⁷ have pointed out). Most notable is the demon karaoke bar Caritas and the marvelous performer Lorne; but we also hear from lawyer Lindsey, the revived vampire Darla, and the actress wannabe Cordelia. Perhaps the most pivotal performance, however, is Angel's wondrously bad version of Barry Manilow's "Mandy" ("Judgment" A2.1). The sweet, sad, silliness of this choice means more than I can write here; suffice it to say that it expanded a dimension of humor for the character that enriched the show (thanks in large part to actor David Boreanaz). The musical humor was welcome in Angel's noir world—so much darker than *Buffy's*. But an even more different world was marked by more different music in *Firefly*. For his space western, Whedon wrote the theme song, and fans at gatherings still sing it aloud, along with *Firefly's* "The Ballad of Jayne." But *Firefly* too has its significant orchestral scoring, in addition to the Irish songs Linda Jencson focuses on in this volume. And then there is the online production *Dr. Horrible's Sing-Along Blog*—Joss Whedon's second full musical, written with his brothers Zack and Jed and Jed's fiancée Maurissa Tancharoen. The spinning wonder of its parodic humor and tragic pain are true Whedon and certainly deserve Kendra Leonard's chapter-length exploration here. And now we have *Dollhouse*: the apparent lassitude of the theme, ending with a music-box tinkle, moves against the slowly growing darkness beneath.

The writer of a foreword must resist the temptation to indulge in too much close reading. But fortunately this volume provides some very good scholars the opportunity to give in to that temptation. Starting with S. Renee Dechert,⁸ good writers have already analyzed the sound and music of Whedon's works. Just as there have been many books on Whedon's narrative and visual content, there can and should be many books on the music of the Whedonverses. *Music, Sound, and Silence in Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (edited by Paul Attinello, Janet Halfyard, and the late Vanessa Knights) has just been released; *Reading Angel* (edited by Stacey Abbott) and *Investigating Firefly and Serenity* (which Tanya Cochran and I edited) both contain small sections on music as well. But the volume you hold in your hands is the first collection on music to cover multiple series by Whedon, and those of us who admire him and his collaborators take great

pleasure in its arrival. Music is one of the keys to Whedon; let these writers help you dig up that key.

Notes

1. Stacey Abbott, ed., *The Cult TV Book* (London: I. B. Tauris), 2010.
2. Joss Whedon, American Academy of Television Arts and Sciences Discussion Panel. Moderator Janet Weeks. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer Season Six DVD Collection*. Twentieth Century Fox, 2003.
3. Janet K. Halfyard, "Love, Death, Curses, and Reverses (in F Minor): Music, Gender, and Identity in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel*," *Slayage: The Online International Journal of Buffy Studies* 1, no. 4 (2001), <http://slayageonline.com/essays/slayage4/halfyard.htm> (accessed March 24, 2009).
4. S. Renee Dechert analyzes the implications of the series' songs in "My Boyfriend's in the Band!": *Buffy* and the Rhetoric of Music," in *Fighting the Forces: What's at Stake in Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, ed. Rhonda V. Wilcox and David Lavery (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), 218–26.
5. Rhonda V. Wilcox, "Can I Spend the Night / Alone?": Segments and Connections in 'Conversations with Dead People.'" Paper presented at the third biennial Slayage Conference on the Whedonverses, Henderson State University, Arkadelphia, Ark., June 5–8, 2008.
6. See Halfyard's essay in this volume.
7. Matthew Mills, in this volume, and "Ubi Caritas? Music as Narrative Agent in *Angel*," in *Reading Angel: The TV Spin-off with a Soul*, ed. Stacey Abbott (London: I. B. Tauris, 2005), 31–43.
8. Dechert, "My Boyfriend's in the Band!"

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NOTES ON ABBREVIATIONS AND USAGE



In this volume, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (the series) is shortened as *Buffy*; *Angel the Series* is shortened to *Angel*. Citations involving the movie *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* are indicated in the text as such. *Dr. Horrible's Sing-Along Blog* is shortened to *Dr. Horrible*.

Episodes in the text are cited as source, season, and episode number. Thus, the eighth episode of *Buffy* Season 1 is cited as "B1.8." Citations for *Angel* follow the same format; the pilot episode of *Angel*, "City Of" is cited as "A1.1." Since *Firefly* had only one season, its episodes are cited only by episode number; thus the first episode is "F1," and the last episode is "F14." Unless indicated otherwise, quotations from episodes are noted by episode name and number.

Finally, for those readers yet uninitiated, the collective fictional universe created by Joss Whedon is known as the "Whedonverse," which includes but is not limited to the "Buffyverse." Alternatively, the separate settings can be referred to as "Whedonverses."



INTRODUCTION

Kendra Preston Leonard



In her online *Buffy Studies Bibliography*, researcher Alysa Hornick lists more than 700 publications available in print, online, or both on Whedon's work, and perhaps another thousand citations of yet-unpublished papers presented at academic conferences around the world.¹ There seem to be few subjects that scholars of Joss Whedon's worlds have not analyzed: topics covered by articles, chapters, books, and papers range from gender and sexuality to consumer culture, from religion to parenting, and from race to fashion. However, while individual essays on music in the various Whedonverses have appeared from time to time in *Slayage: The Online International Journal of Buffy Studies* (now *Slayage: The Online International Journal of Buffy Studies*) or at conferences, there have been few concerted efforts to collect critiques and investigations of the music used in *Buffy* and *Angel*, much less the music and sounds of *Firefly*, *Serenity*, and *Dr. Horrible's Sing-Along Blog*. This volume seeks to both remedy this gap in the literature and to offer those interested in the rich musical worlds of these shows ideas and thoughts to inform their own research and intellectual explorations.

The chapters of this collection are organized roughly by time, starting with the music of *Buffy* before moving on to *Angel*. The later chapters examine the short-lived *Firefly* and its movie sequel, *Serenity*, and the book closes with a chapter on *Dr. Horrible's Sing-Along Blog*, first released online during the summer of 2008. More than half of the chapters focus

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on *Buffy*, which, with its seven seasons and richness of musical material, is fertile ground for examination. In the first essay, Jacqueline Bach uses theories of narrativity in television to track the musical arcs used in *Buffy* to reward the careful and devoted listener. In “Welcome to the Hellmouth: *Buffy*’s Music Arc,” Bach argues that by using obviously connected songs and themes, the producers of the show enabled viewers to become narratologists themselves, giving them the power to understand seasonal plot arcs and multiseason developments equal to insider knowledge.

In “Theorizing Television Music as Serial Art: *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and the Narratology of Thematic Score,” Christopher Wiley also applies current trends in narratology in order to analyze the use of leitmotif in *Buffy* as a device for ensuring continuity despite the fragmented nature of serials. Wiley illustrates this employment of recurring cues with careful and detailed analysis of several important themes that occur in the episode “Hush,” including “Buffy and Riley,” “Willow and Tara,” and “The Gentlemen.” Ultimately arguing that serial television, like the serial novel of the nineteenth century or, indeed, a number of genres of music, has relied on structures including stages of presentation and recapitulation to function successfully, Wiley questions whether the era of the DVD and the creation of canons, such as that which surrounds *Buffy*, have brought the need for such forms to an end.

Elizabeth Clendinning focuses on the way music narrates the arc of Spike in “Spike Ensouled: The Sonic Transformations of a Champion.” As Clendinning writes, music humanizes Spike by providing him with the preferences and quirks of the rest of the Scoobies: music tells them—and viewers—what this “big bad” is really like. Music continually frames and reframes Spike: in his first appearance in season two, punk proclaims him a “bad boy” intent on stirring up trouble; in season six he references Nirvana’s “Smells Like Teen Spirit” in a gesture that is part swagger, part commentary on his journey thus far; as he is tortured and manipulated by The First in season seven, his origins as an insecure human are recalled through the use of “Early One Morning.” Spike is perhaps the character most depicted through musical means, and it is indisputable that music plays a significant role in his development through the final episode of *Buffy*.

Amanda Howell also examines the music surrounding Spike as part of her investigation of gender and popular music in “More Than Just a

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Rock 'n' Roll Reversal: Tracking Gender on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.” Howell’s analysis of music and the cultural implications associated with various genres and songs explicates the ways in which countless elements of *Buffy* were affected by the series’ youth-oriented soundtrack. In studying the conscious reversals of teen clichés, she argues that the gender conventions surrounding rock music and musicians, the figure of the “rebel,” and that of the beautiful young blond in peril are revisited and revised. Such revisions, Howell writes, are crucial to understanding Buffy’s—and *Buffy*’s—multilayered challenges to the status quo, opening up new worlds of musical representation for heroes and heroines to come.

In “A Sweet Vamp: Critiquing the Treatment of Race in *Buffy* and the American Musical Once More (with Feeling),” Jeffrey Middents looks at music and race in Sunnydale, particularly within the events of “Once More, With Feeling.” The uniformly white Buffyverse rarely engages with nonwhite characters, although as Middents acknowledges, there is plenty of the Other to be found in Sunnydale’s werewolves, vampires, and assorted demons, good and evil. The introduction of the demon Sweet, coded through music, dance, and costume as black or Chicano, allows Whedon to both refer to and reject stereotypes of black performers among otherwise all-white casts in film musicals. As Middents writes, even though Sweet is unable to take Dawn back home with him, he is the ultimate winner in the episode: as the most powerful player in the mix, he has forced the Scoobies to admit their innermost secrets.

These secrets are the focus of Cynthia Masson’s essay “Concealing Truths: Rhetorical Questions in ‘Once More, With Feeling.’” Through analysis of music and text, Masson proposes that while the questions posed by the songs in OMWF allow the characters to acknowledge hidden truths, they also obscure the same. The language of the episode’s questions—including Buffy’s opening lines, asking for answers to her post-resurrection malaise (“Will I stay this way forever?”)—are rhetorical in nature; they have no real answers. The dichotomy of this revealing/concealing nature allows for open-ended speculation on the part of characters’ motivations and true desires, as well as their constant avoidance of solid answers and commitments. As Masson shows, this in turn opens up an entirely new discussion of Buffy’s own conflicted journey through season six.

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Janet K. Halfyard, in “Singing Their Hearts Out: The Problem of Performance in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel*,” also examines the issue of vocality in the Buffyverse, focusing on nonmagically induced singing and performance. In her survey of performances in both *Buffy* and *Angel*, Halfyard finds that deliberately poor performances can be read as indicators of sincerity on the part of the performers, such as Cordelia’s bad acting and singing at Caritas. On the other hand, in general, both characters and viewers should be wary of those whose performances are highly polished—Darla, Lindsey, and Harmony all give solid performances that emphasize their abilities as performers, actors, and, by extension, liars.

Music in the world of *Angel* is at the heart of Matthew Mills’s study “*Angel*’s Narrative Score.” Employing narratology much as Wiley and Bach have, Mills identifies several ways in which music is put to narrative uses in *Angel*, comparing its underscore to that found in the cinema rather than on the small screen. Mills breaks down the scoring for *Angel* into musical blocks, which, like the recurring musical tropes of *Buffy*, serve to provide continuity and to reward the constant viewer with foreshadowing and insider commentary. By integrating concepts from multimedia studies into his analysis of *Angel*’s leitmotifs, Mills demonstrates how closely woven musical and plot themes drive crucial emotional and developmental events in the show’s arcs. Mills also investigates the use of source, or diegetic, music throughout the series’ run, chronicling the ways in which songs that seem to obviously comment on the situations at hand often have deeper, more subtle meanings and purposes than viewers might at first understand. As Mills writes, *Angel* is a rich text awaiting even further study.

Stanley C. Pelkey’s essay “Still Flyin’? Conventions, Reversals, and Musical Meaning in *Firefly*” leaves the Buffyverse for the world of Whedon’s short-lived but critically acclaimed space western and its film sequel. Pelkey situates *Firefly* in its historical context as part of the American television western and finds that while Whedon and composer Greg Edmonson created a score to reinforce this connection, they also use the series’ soundtrack to revise and reverse some of the traditional meanings of the music associated with life on the frontier. Race, gender, and status within the hierarchy of this particular Whedonverse are musically mapped onto preexisting tropes of traditional television westerns, including the antihero, the savage Other, the exotic Other, the traumatized soldier, and others. Pelkey’s analysis demonstrates not just the traditional uses

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of such conventions, but also their use in emphasizing reversals, much as Howell does in examining the music of *Buffy*. Ultimately, Pelkey argues that the familiar music of the western and its manipulations at the hands of Edmonson and Whedon provide an enticing vision of untamed lands and unknown places.

Linda Jencson's essay, "My Rifle's as Bright as My Sweetheart's Eyes': Joss Whedon's *Firefly* and the Songs of the Clancy Brothers," also engages with colonial issues by using the music of the iconic Irish band as a lens through which to view Whedon's take on colonialism, rebellion, and oppression as experienced by those aboard *Serenity*. As she writes, the revolutionary actions of the frequently moral but lawless crew of *Serenity* mirror the sentiments and sympathies of the Clancy Brothers in their quest to spark revolt against the British occupiers of Ireland. By locating *Firefly*'s stories in the tradition of Irish colonialism and its resulting stressors, Jencson offers insights into Whedon's use of recurring motifs from a multitude of civil wars, expressed most eloquently in song.

In "The Meaning of 'World Music' in *Firefly*," Eric Hung explores the connections between "good" and "evil" characters, their ethnic identities, and the music associated with them. Although Edmonson has referred to using diverse elements in the score for the series and employs non-Western instruments, Hung argues that their use is far from integrated. Rather, his analysis finds that claims of the music's being socially progressive are superficial; in many cases, Western musical languages and forms are still used to score the familiar and morally superior, while "world music" accompanies the "bad guys" of the Alliance, Adlai Niska, and Reavers; the "exotic" Companions; and colonial worlds whose music is visually and musically more primitive and repetitive than that of more "civilized" worlds.

Finally, "The Status Is Not Quo': Gender and Performance in *Dr. Horrible's Sing-Along Blog*" considers the interplay of music and masculinity in the *Rent* and *Sweeney Todd*-influenced online musical. Analysis reveals that the combination of genres and their associated gender norms allows for both the parodying of and a relaxing of conventional markers of masculinity and femininity. The resulting environment could be pure campy fun, but in a final subversion of the musical that ironically conforms to superhero origin stories, it is instead a world whose darkness compares with the legendary Gotham.

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The musical worlds of Joss Whedon are rich and complex, and Whedon's own interests in music and commitments to further creative work promise even more soundscapes to come. This collection, I hope, will serve as a gateway for those drawn to the musics of the Whedonverse, and be followed by further explorations of its sounds and songs.

Note

1. Alysa Hornick, *Buffy Studies Bibliography*. www.alysa316.com/Buffyology (accessed December 30, 2008).



CHAPTER ONE

WELCOME TO THE HELLMOUTH *Buffy's Music Arc*

Jacqueline Bach



Spike: “Sing me a new one sometime—that one’s gone stale.”¹

In a show like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, if you hear a song, take note. You might hear it again. Fans who watched season three might remember the episode “Band Candy” (B3.6), in which Giles and Joyce, both under a spell that made them return to their adolescence, listen to Cream’s “Tales of Brave Ulysses” before, or maybe after, they have sex. In “Forever” (B5.17), the episode of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* immediately after “The Body” (B5.16), in which Buffy’s mother, Joyce, dies, there is a shot of Giles, holding a drink and listening to a recording of the same song. Those viewers who had not kept up with the show, missed episodes, or didn’t remember the earlier scene, however, were likely to miss this musical reference. Viewers who recognized the reference were, albeit momentarily, jolted out of the current narrative and plunged back into a previous narrative, a happier one. *Buffy’s* creation of a music arc, or the collection of songs and sounds used throughout the series, intentionally calls attention to itself for those who take an active role in following its narrative.

Buffy scholars have examined how music functions within the narrative structure of the show’s seven seasons. They have written about how the series’ music functions diegetically, non-diegetically, or even extra-diegetically. Using industry terms from film and television, Vanessa Knights categorizes the show’s music into source (music originating from



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a source on screen, such as a radio) or scoring (music not coming from the screen).² Scholars have also explored how *Buffy*'s music creates community on and off the show,³ contains masculine and feminine codes,⁴ guides viewers' interpretations of characters,⁵ and mirrors the characters' journeys as emerging adults.⁶ Referring to Giles's use of music in "Forever" in her book *Why Buffy Matters*, Rhonda Wilcox points out how the intratextual use of music in this scene acts as a "reward for faithful viewers" because they are able to recognize the significance behind Giles's listening to this song.⁷ In other words, the decision to give music its own arc adds another way in which viewers interact with the series.

I argue in this chapter that the music the audience does pay attention to is the music that works to create what Jason Mittell identifies as "narrative complexity" in some television shows created during the past two decades.⁸ Mittell argues that episodes in contemporary television can either stand alone, further the season's narrative arc, or both.⁹ For example, new viewers may tune in to an episode and be able to follow most of the action because of the repetitive dialogue used each week to (re)introduce characters. Moreover, Mittell explains that narratively complex shows use "storytelling devices [like voiceovers and fantasy scenes] with such frequency and regularity as to become more the norm than the exception."¹⁰ Viewers, therefore, not only come to expect these devices but also learn how to apply them in order to follow episode story arcs as well as ongoing ones. Shows that feature aspects of narrative complexity feature story arcs that offer "backstory for in-jokes and self-awareness" as well as direct references to actions taken by characters in previous episodes.¹¹ Music, too, can also serve these functions by quickly establishing a character's personality or referring to a previous episode without having to rely on dialogue. Therefore, like characters and plotlines, there are pieces of music that may appear only once in the series and then other pieces that are heard throughout an entire season. While music becomes one of those tools for narrative complexity, in *Buffy* it also creates its own arc, thereby providing viewers with another trajectory to trace.

Music in contemporary television shows sometimes functions ironically, allusively, and self-referentially, and *Buffy*'s audience, over time, learned to notice when music worked in such a way as to disrupt the narrative or pull them out of *Buffy*'s world. Like characters who have their own histories that extend before, after, and in between episodes,¹² *Buffy*'s

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music, too, possesses and uses its own narrative in order to further its own storyline. In this way, *Buffy's* music develops an arc, similar to a story or character arc. Michael Porter, Deborah Larson, Allison Harthcock, and Kelly Nellis define a traditional story arc within television as the phenomenon in which a “story may be introduced in one episode, developed in a following episode, and brought to a climax in later episodes. Development can occur over several episodes or span an entire season: hence the name, story arc.”¹³ *Buffy's* music develops in a similar way; a piece of music—for example, Cream’s “Tales of Brave Ulysses”—is introduced in season three and then is used again in season five. Because *Buffy's* music incorporates many of the techniques of what Michael Z. Newman uses to describe the arc of a prime time serial (PTS)—it is repetitive, recursive, crosses over into its spinoff (*Angel*), and functions at all three levels of this genre (the “beat,” the episode, and the arc)—it creates what can be called a music arc.¹⁴ Once the show’s composers, writers, producers, and directors create this music arc, they proceed to explore its boundaries in relation to the genre, its audience, and its own identity.

Television scholars note that today’s relationships between viewers and shows often become symbiotic ones, as writers learn week by week what fans think of their episodes and sometimes use that feedback in the show’s overall direction. In addition, dedicated fans and scholars of the shows who search for the complex meaning behind a particular song or band construct websites that catalog these references, and discuss the innovative ways music functions through the medium. *Buffy* combines popular music, indie bands, scores, its characters’ diegetic singing, and even its creator Joss Whedon’s music (as in the episodes “Once More, With Feeling” and “Selfless”), all of which play as much of a role as the characters and their stories do. However, casual viewers of the show are probably not likely to pay attention to the lyrics of a band playing at The Bronze while an important conversation is on-screen, and even less likely to catch all of the self-referentiality that occurs in the show, especially if they are watching episodes as reruns or otherwise out of order. On the other hand, there are musical moments that do appear to be hard not to notice. First, there are the trio of episodes “Hush” (which for just over half the episode there is no spoken dialogue, only music), “The Body” (which has no music or score at all), and “Once More, With Feeling” (which resembles a Broadway musical); the first and third of these are discussed

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at length elsewhere in this volume. Nerf Herder's theme song has also attracted much scholarship.¹⁵ What is it about these uses of music that makes them memorable and probably noticed by most viewers?

In the first part of this chapter, I will discuss how music creates its own arc much in the same way story and characters do. Second, by working within the framework of contemporary television studies, I will examine which musical moments disrupt the show's narrative and are therefore more likely to turn audience members into what Mittell calls "amateur narratologists noting usage and violations of convention, chronicling chronologies, and highlighting both inconsistencies and continuities across episodes and even series."¹⁶ This approach contributes much to the contemporary discussion of television narrative and music because it suggests that music acts in ways "that work against the conventions of episodic and serial traditions . . . despite the clear influence from other forms such as novel, films, videogames, and comic books."¹⁷ Mittell, however, does not fully examine how music functions in narrative complexity, although he implies that music might act as a way of creating this new form.¹⁸

Applying Mittell's argument to the notion of a *Buffy* music arc suggests that the music viewers are most likely to pay attention to occurs when they are pulled out of the narrative in order to examine how the writers/directors accomplished a particular scene. These moments, Mittell offers, make the viewer "marvel at how the writers pulled it off."¹⁹ In *Buffy*, music undoubtedly serves as one of those techniques that "we are more likely to pay attention to" when "we are pulled out of the diegesis."²⁰ Loyal viewers of the show are not just pulled out of Whedon's fictional world; they become ultra-aware of the significance of a musician or a piece of music that is used more than once in the series. For example, the use of Sarah McLachlan's music is closely associated with Buffy's relationship with her community at the end of two specific seasons. McLachlan's song "Full of Grace" plays at the end of season two as Buffy leaves Sunnydale after she has killed Angel. Season six ends with McLachlan's "Prayer of St. Francis" as Buffy climbs out of the ground with Dawn to regroup with her friends. The use of McLachlan's voice and music highlights and reminds the audience of the show's message on the importance of community, which had been steadily lost and regained during the series. Claudia

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Gorbman calls this referential use of music meta-diegetic; the audience notices it and might think about its relevance, even though several seasons have passed since the first use of a Sarah McLachlan song.²¹ According to Mittell, “Through the operational aesthetic these complex narratives invite viewers to engage at the level of formal analyst, dissecting the techniques used to convey spectacular displays of storytelling craft; this mode of formally aware viewing is highly encouraged by these programs, as their pleasures are embedded in a level of awareness that transcends the traditional focus on diegetic action typical of most viewers.”²²

Many viewers marvel at how well these songs capture these particular moments; “amateur narratologists” are able to connect the later scene with the earlier scene and draw further conclusions about Buffy Summers’s journey.²³ Part of this transformation means being able to recognize how music works narratively at multiple levels throughout a series. The other part is examining the ongoing creation and function of a show’s music and sound.

As part of his call for a poetics of television, Newman describes the three parts to the “contemporary scripted prime time serial,” which can be used to understand how *Buffy*’s music arc works.²⁴ Newman argues that in spite of the significant changes in American television, the “basic narrative conventions” of this form (recapping essential bits of information, for example) must still be completed in an engaging way. He maintains that while television networks profit from these strategies because they attract and retain a somewhat small but very loyal audience, they also contribute a “powerful mode of storytelling.”²⁵ Newman then examines the components of the PTS and some of those characteristics that constitute contemporary television storytelling. Beats, he explains, are the two- to three-minute segments that make up the episode’s story; six beats equals an episode. A single episode of PTS can either stand alone, contain beats that work to move the season’s story along, or both. In *Buffy*, he continues, that means there is usually a villain who is defeated in a particular episode, but that the characters may also engage with the season’s ongoing “big bad,” such as Glory in season five. Interactions within beats and episodes then relate to a PTS’s arc. A brief examination of the role serialization plays in the PTS illustrates how the creation of an arc sets up these instances of storytelling.

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Same *Buffy* Time, Same *Buffy* Place: The Role of Serialization in Creating a Music Arc

According to Matthew Mills, other than the scant attention paid to *Ally McBeal* and its use of music across seasons as a narrative agent, little scholarship exists on the role of music in furthering non-*Buffy* series' plots and characters.²⁶ On the other hand, there is an abundance of scholarship and fans' comments on the music in *Buffy* and *Angel*. Mills points out the similarities between the music of the two television shows: the recurrence and disappearance of musical themes, the use of music to mislead viewers, and the wide variety of types of music employed, from nineteenth-century period music to contemporary popular tunes. Furthermore, Mills notes how *Angel*'s music (and, as I contend, *Buffy*'s music) employs repetition, a necessary and successful element of the PTS. Examining how these various incarnations of themes function within the media of television can demonstrate what happens when a PTS creates its own music arc: specifically, that an arc can turn an audience into amateur narratologists able to enjoy the show on another level when they notice a particular characteristic or anomalous use of music within an episode or series of episodes.

While the devices these shows depend on to create arcs may seem new, scholars point out the many commonalities between televised serials and textual ones. Horace Newcomb's work on serial narratives points out that serialized television shows often resemble nineteenth-century novels, which were published piece by piece and unraveled week by week. That process encouraged readers to imagine possible future choices that might complicate characters' lives.²⁷ Rhonda Wilcox, too, points out the similarities between *Buffy* and nineteenth-century serialized novels, especially those of Dickens, of whom Whedon is a fan. She notes that although Whedon and his writers knew about a season's arc from the beginning stages, "it is possible that the early versions of a pattern are purposeful foreshadowing."²⁸ The serialization of music in the show can be explored in much the same way: Did the show's composers, the music directors, or Joss Whedon know that a particular piece of music would be one they would return to—such as the second playing of Cream's "Tales of Brave Ulysses"? If the simple act of breaking a saucer can lend layers of meaning and is essential in narrative serialization, then music too, which receives much careful direction and choice, plays just as an important role in serial-

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ized narratives like *Buffy*.²⁹ A song becomes more than just a song when viewers are able to trace a particular piece of music's relationship with a story or character arc.

Although the music in season one is what viewers might expect (reliance on stock teenage music and the horror genre), there are a few standouts which begin the work of creating a music arc. In the last episode of the season ("Prophecy Girl," B1.12), Xander listens to Patsy Cline's "I Fall to Pieces" before the shot segues to a scene featuring Buffy also listening to music to console herself over a failed relationship. Her music is not as memorable or recognizable as Xander's, as if to suggest Buffy will soon gain a more lasting relationship (which she does with Angel) and that Xander never really had a chance with Buffy. Furthermore, in that same episode, two variations of Nerf Herder's music are used. First, as Buffy, Xander, and Angel march toward the Master's lair to fight him, Nerf Herder's theme music blares in the background. After the battle, the same theme is repeated as a slow, melodic variation for piano. While the incorporation of *Buffy*'s theme music into the actual episode might conjure annoyance with amateur narratologists who long for the show's theme song to remain where it "belongs," placing this use early in *Buffy*'s music arc illuminates the appropriateness of ending the show's first season decisively, as the show might not have been picked up for another season.

How *Buffy*'s Music Arc Functions at the Beat, Episode, and Arc Level

While Newman does not specifically mention music as one of those narrative conventions of a PTS, music does perform at all three levels in some television shows. For example, a few contemporary characters in recent television shows have experiences and identities linked to a particular genre or even artist (for example, the Ally McBeal / Vonda Shepard pairing). *Buffy*'s music works differently in each of these three levels. A villain or group of villains might be associated with a distinctive music that works within a beat, as in "Bargaining" (B6.1), when the motorcycle demons get on their bikes to invade Sunnydale because they believe Buffy is a robot and therefore defeatable. The chaotic rock is not repeated in the episode. They are not the season's "big bad" or arguably the most powerful enemy to be overcome in this episode; in fact, they

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are present for only a few beats. On the other hand, “The Pack” (B1.5) features “villain music” that recurs throughout the episode. Each time the group of students, led by Xander, attacks someone, drumming is heard in the background. Finally, each season’s main villain has his or her own theme music that can be heard throughout the entire season, like the chantlike soundscape that occurs throughout season five to mark the appearance of Glory. As Newman points out, repetition is essential in the PTS in getting new audience members up to speed and retaining fans.³⁰ Because repetition is important, music not only reminds viewers of the “big bad” but also assists them in distinguishing the villain of the moment, week, or season.

The music of a PTS may work narratively in such a way that it turns viewers into active participants who recognize and research the meanings behind particular musical choices that accompany the beats, episodes, and arcs of the show. Within these parts, viewers learn which types of music, for example, signify a commercial break, notify that a fight is about to ensue, or set up a cliffhanger ending. While many shows employ music in such a fashion, *Buffy*’s music arc also functions within what Seymour Chatman describes as “kernels” and “satellite” scenes.³¹ Kernels are scenes that contribute to a story’s progression, while satellite scenes are minor plot events that do not contain vital information. Building on Chatman’s work, Porter et al. describe scenes that function as disturbances, complications, or resolutions as “kernels” because they are essential to understanding a particular story line. “Satellite” scenes, on the other hand, draw audiences into the story, clarify events, foreshadow, and represent themes.³² As *Buffy*’s audience learned how to categorize its music into the various roles, those who produced the show used that knowledge to thwart viewers’ expectations. While Tanya Krzywinska proposes that *Buffy*’s viewers have “to have some investment in the show to make its stories and character arcs meaningful, and that means the show demands less work and time on the part of the viewer [than an epic narrative video game],” viewers who invest time into the show’s music engage in quite a bit of work researching and sharing these references, especially through online formats.³³

The show’s love themes also work at beat, episode, and arc levels, diegetically, non-diegetically, and meta-diegetically. An example of music at the beat level is the aforementioned example from “Prophecy Girl”

(B1.12), in which Xander plays Patsy Cline’s “I Fall to Pieces” after being rejected by Buffy. At the episodic level, we hear the hauntingly tragic song “I Only Have Eyes for You” (B2.19) as Angel and Buffy reenact the murder-suicide of two former students who have become ghosts. Finally, at the arc level is Buffy’s love theme with Angel and the “bluer and stranger music” with Riley. Xander and Cordelia’s love theme also works both at the episodic level and at the arc level, appearing frequently during the second season and just once more during the third season. As discussed earlier, Cream’s “Tales of Brave Ulysses” also appears during two different episodes and seasons, the first time to further extrapolate on Giles’s youthful identity and the gap between his musical tastes and Joyce’s, and again in the episode after “The Body.” The first playing is humorous, the second tragic.

These Aren’t the Soundtracks You’re Looking For: How Buffy’s Music Arc Complicates Things

The ways in which music is introduced and recycled in the series demonstrate how music fits into Mittell’s discussion of the ways in which prime time serials employ complex narrativity.³⁴ Like Wilcox’s discussion of blueprints, or “representations in small relationships and patterns which serve as predictors for future episodes,” music foreshadows events to come.³⁵ For example, in “Reptile Boy” (B2.5), the song “She” by Louie Says plays during the fraternity party and is played again at The Bronze at the end of the episode. This repetition serves, to use Giles’s words, as a “tad redundant” way to illustrate Buffy’s maturing interpretation of men.³⁶ She realizes that Tom, who is “not like other frat boys,” is not what he seemed to be, and by the end of the episode she decides not to be so quick to trust Angel. The song, whose lyrics refer to a girl bending and breaking, also acts as a commentary on the improbability of Buffy’s ever being able to have a “normal” relationship with a “normal” male. Furthermore, this deliberate repetition of a particular song makes up part of what Mittell describes as “explicit reflexivity,” in which musical, visual, or textual techniques “guide, manipulate, deceive, and misdirect viewers” and cause them to marvel at the show’s “narrative pyrotechnics.”³⁷ *Buffy’s* music often plays a key role in this manipulation, especially in regard to eliciting emotional effects.

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According to Mittell, Wilcox (in reference to *Buffy*), and Margaret Mackey (in reference to *Felicity*), music affects the viewers' emotional reactions to a particular scene or situation, that in fact "this pleasure is heightened for those in a better position to recognize the songs and take a more detailed pleasure in the evocations."³⁸ It is no accident, then, that the three most narratively complex episodes ("Hush," "The Body," and "Once More, With Feeling") employ music at the beat, episode, and arc levels and have been the most extensively analyzed episodes of the series. "Hush" is for some the most terrifying episode, with its absence of spoken dialogue; "The Body" the saddest for its focus not just on Joyce's death, but the characters' reactions to it (Whedon notes in the DVD commentary that the absence of music acts "as a formal exercise"³⁹); and "Once More, With Feeling" the most widely appreciated and known for featuring some of the best-known music of the series. Whedon is careful, however, in avoiding "stunts" that might pull the viewer entirely out of the narrative: "The episodes where I break the traditional format of the show are never an attempt at a stunt, because I don't like things that are just stunts. I think stunts take you out of the narrative and they become more important than the show."⁴⁰ The decisions made regarding *Buffy's* music arc, therefore, must be crafted as skillfully as the story and character arcs.⁴¹

In his discussion of narrative complexity, Mittell goes on to suggest ways in which viewers become "formal analysts" who "dissect the techniques used to convey spectacular displays of storytelling craft."⁴² Once this relationship with viewers is established, a television program will "invite temporary disorientation and confusion, allowing viewers to build up their comprehension skills through long-term viewing and active engagement."⁴³ Those viewers who are unfamiliar with Tony Head's singing experience are certainly jolted out of the narrative world in season four when they (and the Scoobies) catch him performing at a coffee shop and then again with Spike, who sneaks up on him as he is singing Lynyrd Skynyrd's "Free Bird." Viewers soon learned of Head's singing career, including his experience in musical theater. The characters' previous singing (or, in Willow's case, fear of singing) all contributed to the audience's responses to "Once More, With Feeling."⁴⁴ Based on the characters' participation in the show's music arc, audiences probably were not surprised to hear Giles sing and probably did not expect Willow to do so.

Bored Already: How DVDs and Reruns Affect Viewers' Awareness of *Buffy's* Music Arc

Prime time serials are now available not only through televised reruns but also DVDs that come out sometimes even before the next season begins. The accessibility of *Buffy* and other shows with multiple seasons puts viewers in a position similar to that of readers reading a series of books and enables them to perceive narrative devices they might not have noticed watching a show in its serialized format throughout a season. As Margaret Mackey, who watched the four seasons of *Felicity* consecutively in a short period of time, notes: "I had less thinking time but I also had less time to forget."⁴⁵ In rewatching seven seasons of *Buffy* for this chapter, I, too, reviewed them from a different vantage point and paid closer attention to the use of music than a casual viewer might. Those who watch the show out of order and catch an episode from the seventh season and then an episode from the first will probably notice various differences in the use of music, but perhaps not at a very sophisticated level. In rewatching the series, I noticed for the first time just how much the music of season one draws heavily from the horror genre and relies almost on stock themes to assist the viewer in following the narration. (Whedon himself notes the progression of not only the use of these stock themes but also their sounds.⁴⁶) In "Welcome to the Hellmouth," *Buffy* creeps toward the girls' locker room to investigate the scene of the dead body, accompanied by a background score that sounds like Nancy Drew teenage detective music, with single tinkling notes building suspense. At the end of "The Harvest" (B1.2), the Scooby gang walks away in a horizontal line from the camera celebrating their teamwork, generic high school music blasting away. Finally, the music for each episode's "big bad" borders on cliché, as heard in the early episodes "Teacher's Pet" and "The Pack." Attentive audiences will later begin to realize that music becomes less didactic as the show progresses.

Partly with the viewer in mind, composer Christophe Beck and those who chose diegetic music for the series began to focus on the power of music to establish personality, and as the series continued they also began to rely more on the incorporation of music to illustrate the identity and growth of character. However, in these early episodes, it is the music at

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The Bronze that establishes itself as most meaningful as it comments on the narrative. While viewers might find this the easiest music to listen to and identify, they may miss some of the meaning behind particular lyrics while focusing on the characters' dialogue.

In his explanation of the role of music as narrative agent in *Angel*, Mills points out the crossover aspects of music between *Angel* and *Buffy*.⁴⁷ He cites one particular music performance from "The Puppet Show" (B1.9) that also makes an appearance in *Angel*. Cordelia, in an *Angel* episode titled "Slouching toward Bethlehem" (A4.4), repeats her fingernails-on-a-blackboard rendition of Whitney Houston's "The Greatest Love of All." Those who never saw the first season of *Buffy* will cringe at this performance; however, those familiar with both shows will remember Cordelia's high school performance. This is another way a music arc can position viewers as amateur narratologists; after hearing Cordelia's second performance, they are encouraged to ponder Cordelia's trajectory. The accessibility of these two shows on DVDs enables more viewers to notice more easily the crossover of music between the two shows, thus also promoting viewers' recognition of musical narrativity between them.

Pulling a Whedon: How a Music Arc Can Subvert a Viewer's Expectations

In her discussion on how *Buffy* and *Angel* explore and play with sex and gender boundaries, Janet K. Halfyard remarks, "This subversion of long-maintained constructs appears to extend to every level; and so it should probably not surprise us that it can also be found in the music that identifies the title characters."⁴⁸ So, too, did the villains' music exploit these conventions as it frequently assumed a sweet, tender sound in later seasons. For example, the teenage boy in "Some Assembly Required" (B2.2) sings the Temptations' song "My Girl" in anticipation of a reconstructed dead girlfriend. At the episode level, *Buffy*'s music identifies the villain in a similar way, especially in the earlier seasons. Usually, there is a shot of that episode's villain accompanied by a blast of ominous, brass-heavy, minor-key "villain music," which often matches that enemy's specific alter ego or power. This predictably allows for those who create the show to reassign this use of music to thwart viewers' expectations: in "All the Way"

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(B6.6) the music at the beat level misleads many in the audience as to the identity of this week's villain. The retired toymaker who sings folksongs and whose diegetic music sounds like it comes from a jack-in-the-box emphasizes the possibility that he will be the "big bad" in this episode, based on the previous use of delusional villains singing to themselves; but ultimately he is killed by the episode's true villain, Dawn's date.

According to Mills, music can also emphasize an unusual situation when it is changed in a way that the viewer does not expect.⁴⁹ One of those situations when music is abruptly interrupted and results in humor is with the appearance of the trio of misfit geeks in season six and continues with Andrew in season seven. Frequently, those interruptions result in humor, for example when the trio try to stifle their *Star Wars* theme-playing horn before it calls Buffy's attention to them. In "Seeing Red" (B6.19), when Andrew tries to escape from Buffy with his jet pack, the supervillain music represented by sustained heavy violins stops as his head hits the top of a roof, highlighting the humor of Buffy, Jonathan, and Andrew's relationship as hero and villains, and undermining how seriously these two particular enemies might be taken.

"Passion" (B2.17) employs music to create dramatic irony to force viewers to imagine Giles's reaction to finding Jenny Calendar's dead body in his bed. The death of a main character in the show is never treated lightly, and music often serves as a commentary on that death (even in its absence, as S. Renee Dechert suggests).⁵⁰ The first death of a main character, during this season, is the first instance of this device. Angel's voiceover at the beginning of the episode notifies the viewer that a significant change has accompanied Angel's loss of his soul. In the opening scene, Angel speaks of passion, while music at The Bronze plays behind him. After Angel kills Jenny in her classroom, we cut to Giles at his apartment, where he finds a trail of roses, a bottle of wine, and a card directing him to "Upstairs."⁵¹ As he ascends the stairs, "O soave fanciulla" from Giacomo Puccini's *La Bohème* increases in volume until Giles sees Jenny's dead body in his bed. The song decrescendos into the next shot, in which it is clear that Giles is still frozen in the scene, this time replaying itself in his mind. The climax of the two voices in the duet match Angel's comments on the "ecstasy of grief" he describes in his ending voiceover to the episode. Even though some audience members may not be able to translate the pair's singing, they

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know what Giles will find at the top of the stairs; they recognize the increasing volume of the music; they have little choice but to beat Giles there, imagine what he will see, and finish the scene before he does. Finally seeing Giles's reaction while still listening to those intense voices is the way the audience experiences an "ecstasy of grief." "Closure," for Giles, "is called into question."⁵² Viewers who recognize or look up the exact music that is playing as Giles goes upstairs experience what John Fiske describes as the appearance of "the leaky boundaries between their diegetic universe and the everyday world of the viewer."⁵³

Strutting and Fretting: A Music Arc Needs a Stage— The Bronze

One of the commonalities between shows like *Ally McBeal* and *Buffy* is the creation of a performance space for much of its diegetic music (which often becomes non-diegetic as the camera leaves The Bronze and shows characters in other locations). The Bronze acts as a way to supply the show with live music that comments on the narrative in subtle ways. In her description of the popular music that accompanied *Felicity*, Mackey notes that it "add[ed] an oblique and plangent commentary to the particularly poignant moments, and the underlining of mood through the snatches of song . . . [which can be] evocative."⁵⁴ However, The Bronze, and particularly its stage, gets caught up in the narrative in two ways, by serving as a venue for "popular music" and as a means for characters to contribute in an authentic way to the show's music arc. From the very first season, *Buffy*'s characters literally dream of performing on the stage (in "Teacher's Pet," B1.4, Xander appears on its stage in his dreams). Oz makes an actual appearance on The Bronze's stage, and it is apparent that the lead guitarist of Dingo's Ate My Baby is the real thing—a true performer—unlike Xander, who merely dreamed of himself onstage playing the guitar in season one. The Bronze helps build the music arc as the viewer begins to recognize the way it works within the show's narrative and learns when to pay attention closely to it.

In the second half of season five and the first half of six, there is slightly less music from The Bronze as the characters grow from teenagers with lots of free time to responsible adults who have adult responsibilities

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and do not have as much time to hang out. However, several important scenes include songs and shots of The Bronze, and the show's music arc in season six reestablishes this site as the most important spot for diegetic, non-diegetic, and meta-diegetic music. As Giles prepares to leave Sunnydale and Tara breaks up with Willow in "Tabula Rasa" (B6.8), the music performed at The Bronze serves as the backdrop for these departures. The ending beat to this episode begins at The Bronze as Michelle Branch sings "Goodbye to You." The parting shot, however, speaks to how *Buffy's* music works in directing the audience's reactions to powerful scenes. The following scenes, void of all sound except for the meta-diegetic use of Branch's song, cut from Buffy sitting at The Bronze's bar to Tara packing her clothes to leave Buffy's house, back to Branch singing then to Giles flying home to England, to Willow crying in the bathroom, to Buffy and Spike, to Dawn and Tara, and then finally, at the close of the episode, to Buffy and Spike kissing. Ironically, the only pair who hear Branch's song are the ones not "saying goodbye." It is an ending just like that of "Once More, With Feeling" (B6.7)—only the "rising music" Spike uses to describe their previous kiss hints at a relationship that will not progress in pure Hollywood style.

In her description of the evocative power of ending an episode of *Felicity* with fragments of a song, Mackey writes, "The placing of many of these fragments of song at episode boundaries also enables the song to linger in the void created by the ending of the story."⁵⁵ Music is at the boundaries of episodes and scenes, such as in the ending of "Tabula Rasa" (B6.8), in which Buffy and Angel's wedding music becomes their breakup music in "The Prom" (B3.20), and when the music that ends "Graduation Day, Part 1" (B3.21) opens "Graduation Day, Part 2" (B3.22). These musical boundaries illustrate how songs not only are placed at the borders of the beat and episode levels in *Buffy*, but also indicate suspensions between episodes. "Graduation Day, Part 2" opens with a single crash, the same musical crash that ended the previous episode, before the music begins a slow, melodic piece featuring a cello. As the viewers listen, they watch Buffy first briefly focus on the knife she used to stab Faith and then see her walk sadly away from the edge of the roof. In this way music mimics the continuation of the characters' lives in between episodes: they linger; they end; they prepare for the next episode.

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“Welcome to the Hellmouth”: The Role of Conflict in a Music Arc

The creation of a music arc provides a way for characters to connect and establish their relationships to one another’s culture—a narrative that might mirror *Buffy*’s varied audiences. Vanessa Knights’s essay on Jenny Calendar’s, Giles’s, and Buffy’s use of *The Sound of Music* argues that the classic musical serves as an intergenerational connection between the three.⁵⁶ This episode, titled “The Dark Age” (B2.8), represents what can happen when community members share knowledge of a particular body of music—they are able to communicate in a different way. This connection is in direct opposition to the gap between Buffy’s workout music, which appeared at the beginning of the episode and which Giles describes as noise, and his preference for the Bay City Rollers. The Bay City Rollers becomes a joke between the two, and the episode sets up music as a recurring trope that eases their communications. “Bewitched, Bothered, and Bewildered” (B2.16) uses a variety of musical styles to highlight the chaos that the community finds itself in after Amy creates a botched spell to persuade Cordelia to return to Xander. This episode’s music ranges from a song parody of the Bee Gees’ “Saturday Night Fever,” played while Xander inadvertently struts down the hallway in Sunnydale High; to light classical music featuring an oboe, used to emphasize the liveliness of Buffy as a rat, transformed by Amy; to the horror-movie music reminiscent of the famous screeching violins in *Psycho* as women and girls clamor to get into Buffy’s house and find Xander.

One episode in the fourth season exemplifies the ways in which one character’s theme music can supersede another’s. In “Superstar” (B4.17), underdog Jonathan casts an augmentation spell that alters everyone’s perception of him: he literally becomes a superstar who is a better fighter, leader, and detective than the entire Scooby gang—until Buffy figures out that something is not as it should be. Music is used to set the mood and establish the plot: the teaser ends with Buffy and her friends entering a lavish mansion to ask its occupant for help, and as they tentatively approach a large, impressive desk, Jonathan spins around in his chair to a blast of James Bond-ian music. To further indicate that something is awry, the opening credits contain shots of Jonathan, ultimately replacing Buffy during the parting credit shot as he walks toward the camera—supplanting Buffy’s role on the show. Throughout the episode, Buffy’s swift,

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sustained fight music consisting of various melodies playing at the same time with varied instrumentation is replaced with Jonathan's spy-flick music featuring horns playing two then three staccato notes. During the fight, Jonathan's music and Buffy's music alternate as the demon's strength wanes and surges with Jonathan's strength. After the final fight scene, in which the evil demon created by Jonathan's spell is killed, an electric guitar plays a simple melody as the town is freed from the spell. In this episode, music demands to be noticed: viewers are asked to refer to their own histories with film, and once again music serves as a blueprint for itself as it sets up the evil trio's fascination with Bond-inspired spycraft and technologies in the sixth season.

This switching back and forth between leading characters' music during a fight occurred with the first appearance of Spike in "School Hard" (B2.3). This strategy not only notifies the viewer who is fighting but also identifies characters and their status during a conflict. In the episode "Beer Bad" (B4.5), when Buffy daydreams that she is fighting vampires in the graveyard while rescuing Parker, her imaginary techno soundtrack decreases in volume every time she addresses Parker and then disappears altogether with the dusting of the last vampire. Furthermore, in season seven, each of the foreign Potentials who are being hunted down in the episode's teaser possesses her own signature music. The Potential from Frankfurt, Germany, in "Lessons" (B7.1) runs from minions accompanied by nightclub music that sounds like the soundtrack to *Run, Lola, Run*, while the Potential located in Istanbul, Turkey, flees while Turkish music complete with zills (finger cymbals) and other percussion instruments is interspersed with the violins that usually signify trouble in *Buffy's* world. This widening of music matches the direction of the show's arc in season seven, which focused on the global possibilities of slayers in a more pronounced way than the brief appearance of Kendra in season two. Viewers learn that music not only sets up identities, mood, and setting, but also works to set the tone for fights, and they recognize these Potentials for what they are before the show announces their role.

Where Do We Go from Here?

One piece of music that remained for the most part unaltered throughout the series was Nerf Herder's opening theme song; however, the sound

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effects and images shown during the opening credits underwent significant changes. David Kociemba points out in detail the changes made in the opening credits and how those changes represented the main characters at different moments of the series,⁵⁷ yet like Buffy's mission to kill vampires, it never changed. However, audiences awaited each new season's opening credits for scenes that provided clues to upcoming episodes. This music arc of the theme, combined with shots from the show, trained audiences to note the significance of a piece of music in a way that they may have overlooked before the advent of the PTS. Such connections not only enrich an audience's experience and set viewers up as "amateur narratologists," but also deepen with every rerun caught for a moment on television or seen in a marathon DVD session.

Buffy's music arc contributed not only to the show's continuity, character development, and sophistication but also set a standard for the ways in which a PTS might incorporate music in order to create narrative complexity. *Buffy's* music arc worked because it consisted of so many different types of music used in so many different ways: "live" music, recorded music, a soundtrack, and music from the characters and the writer/director himself. These pieces combined to weave their own narrative; they tell their own story. The creation of a music arc like that in *Buffy* opens up possibilities for writers, directors, and composers to work together to create another narrative for a show. Once that arc becomes established, viewers may then begin the work of fitting together different musical pieces and references within and outside a show. In the case of *Buffy*, those references extend beyond its narrative world and into other worlds.

Notes

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Rhonda V. Wilcox and David Lavery (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), 219.

4. Janet K. Halfyard, "Love, Death, Curses, and Reverses (in F Minor): Music, Gender, and Identity in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel*," *Slayage: The Online International Journal of Buffy Studies* 1, no. 4 (2001), paragraph 6, www.slayageonline.com (accessed October 21, 2008).

5. Matthew Pateman, *Aesthetics of Culture in Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2006), 178.

6. Jacqueline Bach, "Not Just Another Love Song: Buffy's Music as Representation of Emerging Adulthood," in *The Truth of Buffy: Essays on Fiction Illuminating Reality*, ed. Emily Dial-Driver, Sally Emmons-Featherson, Jim Ford, and Carolyn Anne Taylor (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2008), 42.

7. Rhonda Wilcox, *Why Buffy Matters: The Art of Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2005), 195.

8. Jason Mittell, "Narrative Complexity in Contemporary American Television," *Velvet Light Trap* 58, no. 1 (2006): 30.

9. Mittell, "Narrative Complexity," 32.

10. Mittell, "Narrative Complexity," 37.

11. Mittell, "Narrative Complexity," 34.

12. Michael J. Porter, Deborah L. Larson, Allison Harthcock, and Kelly Berg Nellis, "Redefining Narrative Events: Examining Television Narrative Structure," *Journal of Popular Film and Television* (2002): 24.

13. Porter et al., "Redefining Narrative Events," 24.

14. Michael Z. Newman, "From Beats to Arcs: Toward a Poetics of Television Narrative," *Velvet Light Trap* 58, no. 1 (2006): 1716–28.

15. Halfyard, "Love, Death, Curses"; and David Kociemba, "'Actually, It Explains a Lot': Reading the Opening Title Sequences of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*," *Slayage: The Online International Journal of Buffy Studies* 6, no. 2 (2005): 1–18.

16. Mittell, "Narrative Complexity," 38.

17. Mittell, "Narrative Complexity," 30.

18. Mittell, "Narrative Complexity," 37.

19. Mittell, "Narrative Complexity," 35.

20. Mittell, "Narrative Complexity," 35.

21. Claudia Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 22–23.

22. Mittell, "Narrative Complexity," 36.

23. Mittell, "Narrative Complexity," 34.

24. Newman, "From Beats to Arcs," 16.

25. Newman, "From Beats to Arcs," 17.

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26. Matthew Mills, "Ubi Caritas?: Music as Narrative Agent in *Angel*," in *Reading Angel: The TV Spin-off with a Soul*, ed. Stacey Abbott (London: I. B. Tauris, 2005), 31.
27. Horace Newcomb, "Narrative and Genre," in *The Sage Handbook of Media Studies*, ed. John D. H. Downing, Denis McQuail, Philip Schlesinger, and Ellen Wartella (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 2004), 422.
28. Wilcox, *Why Buffy Matters*, 115.
29. See Wilcox, 114, for an interesting discussion of the role of Joyce dropping a saucer at The Bronze.
30. Newman, "From Beats to Arcs," 17.
31. Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1978), 53–54.
32. Porter et al., "Redefining Narrative Events," 26–27.
33. Tanya Krzywinska, "Arachne Challenges Minerva: The Spinning-out of Long Narrative in World of Warcraft and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*," September 29, 2008, <http://bura.brunel.ac.uk/bitstream/2438/1058/1/Arachne+challenges+Minerva.pdf>, 25.
34. Mittel, "Narrative Complexity," 36.
35. Wilcox, *Why Buffy Matters*, 60.
36. "Reptile Boy." *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Season 2). Dir. David Greenwalt. DVD. Twentieth Century Fox, 1997.
37. Mittel, "Narrative Complexity," 36.
38. Mittel, "Narrative Complexity," 36.
39. Joss Whedon, "Commentary: 'The Body.'" *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Season 5). DVD. Twentieth Century Fox, 2006.
40. Paul Ruditis, "Excerpt from *Buffy Script Book: Once More with Feeling*," British Broadcasting Corp. September 29, 2008. www.bbc.co.uk/cult/buffy/buffystuff/script_musical_excerpt.shtml (accessed October 21, 2008).
41. See Christopher Wiley's essay "Theorizing Television Music as Serial Art: *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and the Narratology of Thematic Score" in this volume.
42. Mittel, "Narrative Complexity," 36.
43. Mittel, "Narrative Complexity," 37.
44. For example, viewers may remember her terrified appearance on the stage in "Restless" (B4.22). Which characters received large singing roles in "Once More, With Feeling" was partly determined not only by their fictional character personas but also their "real" abilities, further blurring the lines between the show and reality.
45. Margaret Mackey, "Serial Monogamy: Extended Fictions and the Television Revolution," *Children's Literature in Education* 37, no. 2 (2006): 157.

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46. Joss Whedon, "Commentary: 'Chosen.'" *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Season 7). DVD. Twentieth Century Fox, 2006.
47. Mills, "Ubi Caritas?" 39.
48. Halfyard, "Love, Death, Curses," paragraph 21.
49. Mills, "Ubi Caritas?" 37.
50. Dechert, "My Boyfriend's in the Band!" 220.
51. "Passion." *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Season 3). Dir. Michael E. Gershman. DVD. Twentieth Century Fox, 1998.
52. John Fiske, "Popular Narrative and Commercial Television," *Camera Obscura: A Journal of Feminism and Film Theory* 23 (May 1990): 138.
53. Fiske, "Popular Narrative," 138.
54. Mackey, "Serial Monogamy," 159.
55. Mackey, "Serial Monogamy," 159.
56. Knights, "Bay City Rollers. Now That's Music," 2.
57. Kociemba, "Actually, It Explains a Lot," paragraph 3.

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CHAPTER TWO

THEORIZING TELEVISION MUSIC AS SERIAL ART

Buffy the Vampire Slayer and the Narratology of Thematic Score

Christopher Wiley



The rich and burgeoning literature on film music, which has for some years enjoyed substantial critical exploration, contrasts strikingly with the current undertheorization of its television counterpart. While a small number of fascinating analyses of aspects of music for television have recently appeared, those by Julie Brown, Robynn Stilwell, and K. J. Donnelly being particularly worthy of note, much research nevertheless remains to be conducted in this vast yet still largely untapped area.¹ The article on television in the latest edition of the foundational *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*—which crystallizes around the televised performance of operas, concerts, and masterclasses, as well as educational documentaries and commentaries about music—is emblematic of the limited musicological scrutiny hitherto received by other elements that are surely equally deserving of serious attention, such as the wealth of original (under)score.² One reason for the relative dearth of dedicated research on music for television, and of academic contemplation of the ways in which it might differ from that for film, is doubtless the tacit supposition that observations about one may similarly apply to the other. It is difficult to dispute the value of film music scholarship in terms of raising certain issues that have wider generic application to other forms of musical multimedia, including that for television; at the same time, my proposition is that to omit to consider television as a separate discursive entity is to overlook its narratological uniqueness.



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This chapter represents research drawn from a continuing project whose overarching purpose is the examination of music in contemporary Anglo-American cult television series. It thus takes the form of a position statement outlining my current thinking on the different narrative structures offered by film and television and their implications for the associated music, coupled to a discussion of how my premises might contribute fresh insights into the specially composed score for *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997–2003) and, to a lesser extent, the spin-off series *Angel* (1999–2004). In endeavoring to situate these shows within recent developments in television on both sides of the Atlantic, I am mindful of the fact that Joss Whedon was himself schooled in England, as reflected in many of the earlier characters to populate the so-called “Whedonverse.” Later sections of my essay are concerned with reevaluation of the compositional technique of leitmotif as employed within a televisual context, with specific reference to the use of music in the celebrated *Buffy* episode “Hush” (B4.10) and its implications throughout the remainder of the fourth season and extending into the fifth. My case study of “Hush” also invites consideration of music’s participation within *Buffy*’s cutting-edge exploration of issues of gender and sexuality: not only was it one of several fantasy and espionage dramas appearing in quick succession to have crystallized around powerful lead females—analogs with *La Femme Nikita* (1997–2001), *Charmed* (1998–2006), and *Alias* (2001–2006) are particularly pronounced—but its pioneering exploration of the emergent lesbian relationship of a regular cast member has its origins in this very episode.

Given the self-evidently thematic construction of their scores, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel* naturally present themselves as prime candidates for analysis in a study of the narrative potentialities of non-diegetic television music. A number of different composers were to work on the two shows during their combined run of twelve programming seasons, the longest-standing of which include Christophe Beck (*Buffy*, primarily seasons 2–4, and *Angel* season 1), Robert J. Kral (*Angel*, seasons 1–5), and Thomas Wanker (*Buffy*, seasons 5–6). Certain experimental episodes, such as “Hush” (B4.10) and “Restless” (B4.22), were critically acclaimed for the richness of their incidental music; conversely, “The Body” (B5.16) was noted for its poignant absence. Yet the original score of the shows was not the only sense in which they were distinctive for their musical content, given the onscreen performances at The Bronze in *Buffy* and Caritas in

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Angel, the introduction of musical characters such as Oz (plus his fictional band Dingoos Ate My Baby) and Lorne, and the much-hyped musical episode “Once More, With Feeling” (B6.7). *Buffy* and *Angel* thus participated in the tradition, which has recently gained much momentum, of including prominent musical performances within mainstream television series;³ parallel manifestations include the bands who perform at P3 in *Charmed*, the role played by Vonda Shepard and a plethora of subsequent popular artists in *Ally McBeal* (1997–2002), the musical episodes of shows such as *Scrubs* (2001–), and the songs that frequently feature, often with lyrics ingeniously rewritten for comic effect, on *The Simpsons* (1989–). Similarly *Buffy*, in particular, has continued the oft-encountered convention of television drama that Julie Brown has designated the “MTV style”: that of cutting between a series of shots that illustrate the state of affairs of principal characters (especially at the ends of episodes), accompanied by a lyrically relevant pop song but with minimal dialogue, in the manner of a music video.⁴ Each of these instances, however, fundamentally concerns texted music, leading to a general tendency among viewers and commentators alike to concentrate their interpretive energies predominantly on the words rather than the sounds.⁵ Without wishing to devalue such endeavors as a means of enhancing our understanding of the televisual product, my focus lies instead with the customarily instrumental music of the score: it is the contribution specifically made by the music—rather than by a combination of music and lyrics—that I wish to place squarely under the scholarly microscope.

In an important study of musical narrative with respect to nineteenth-century opera, Carolyn Abbate considered music as “*narrating* only rarely,” affirming that “certain gestures experienced in music constitute a narrating *voice*” against its surrounding, more generic or rhetorical, material that exists merely as sound.⁶ In film and television, the leitmotifs that emerge at pivotal moments during which their scores genuinely “narrate” in the sense theorized by Abbate thereby constitute a prime agent for the construction of such musical meaning and its communication to the target audience. Originating ultimately in the music dramas of Richard Wagner, the technique of leitmotif has become a staple for film-score composition that has enjoyed a rich history, thoroughly reinvigorated in recent decades through the perceived revival of the so-called classical Hollywood film score with which John Williams’s music for the first *Star Wars*

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trilogy (1977–1983) will forever be associated.⁷ Yet it is not uncommon for studio composers to have worked, to a greater or lesser degree, in both film and television in the course of their careers. John Williams, whom Robynn Stilwell held to have revolutionized television scores with *Lost in Space* (1965–1968) over a decade before his work on the earliest of the *Star Wars* films, is himself a key example;⁸ another was Jerry Goldsmith, whose symphonic film scores kept the classical Hollywood tradition alive in the decade or so prior to Williams’s rejuvenation of it.⁹ It therefore should come as little surprise that leitmotif is by no means exclusive to music of the cinema, particularly when, as in much of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel*, television scores are written in a similarly Wagnerian, quasi-orchestral vein.

While the employment of such compositional procedures within filmic contexts has elicited significant critical attention, their application within the strikingly different medium of television has often been overlooked. In positioning the two as narratologically distinct, I do not wish to imply that they merely exist as hermetically sealed entities, devoid of cross-pollination both with one another and with other forms of musical multimedia; various traditions that have evolved over the years should serve to detract from such a view. Pilots for proposed television shows are even sometimes written as feature-length installments that can air either as two-part introductory episodes (if a full series is ultimately commissioned) or as a stand-alone “television movie” (if it is not). Successful films can spawn fully fledged television series; conversely, television franchises may be reinvented as films, whether resurrected years after the event or transferred to the cinema upon completion of a popular television run. The box office performance of the recent *Sex and the City* movie (2008) alone illustrates the continuing currency of the phenomenon, its commercial success having fueled speculation that other cult series, including *Friends* (1994–2004) and the U.K.’s newly invigorated *Doctor Who* (2005–), may follow suit. Links between the small and silver screens are particularly evident within Joss Whedon’s oeuvre: *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* started out as a film (1992) prior to its being reborn as a highly successful television series; *Firefly* (2002–2003) was continued as the film *Serenity* (2005) after its being unexpectedly axed midseason by Fox; and Warner Bros.’ press release on the cancellation of *Angel* hinted that the show might live on in undisclosed “special movie events” following the conclusion of its stint on television.¹⁰

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With the caveat in place that sweeping statements about television and film will be generalizations at best, not least in view of the extensive common ground that they share, there is nonetheless much scholarly merit in contemplating their differences as well as their similarities. In terms of the rendering of the music to the listener, one oft-cited consideration lies in the inferior quality of sound reproduction offered by televisions themselves, the implications of which were historically more pronounced given the continuing technological advances that have ultimately led to the “home cinema” of today. Another is the cultural tendency for viewers to be less consistent in the level of attention devoted to the (typically domestic) activity of watching television—which surely lends its aural component an added significance as a means of reestablishing their interest when their concentration, whether deliberately or inadvertently, wavers. John Hill and Martin McLoone’s edited anthology *Big Picture, Small Screen*, meanwhile, has suggested that the factors that have led in recent decades to a closer relationship between the two media have been predominantly economic—particularly in Europe, television has come to provide much financial support for the film industry—rather than aesthetic, technological, or cultural.¹¹ It is therefore especially ironic that television programs are generally produced on much tighter budgets than films, with major implications for all resources, including their music. Mark Snow’s score for television episodes of *The X-Files* (1993–2002), for example, relied heavily on synthesizers under the composer’s own control; conversely, for the first movie (1998), released in between the series’ fifth and sixth seasons, an eighty-five-piece symphony orchestra was at his disposal. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel* attained an artful compromise in this respect, often utilizing a combination of computer-generated music and a small number of live instruments in order to give a convincing impression of an acoustic performance.

If we accept the premise that television and film can offer quite different narrative frameworks within which the music may operate, then much of the key to understanding their distinctiveness lies in the significance of the former’s being ontologically dependent on the entwined concepts of the series and serialization. Whereas film represents a discrete and essentially autonomous artistic unit taking place on a relatively large canvas, television series unfold in substantially smaller-scale installments that play out over the much wider spans of annual programming seasons. Typically, U.S. television dramas run for twenty-two to twenty-six episodes per season, with

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new installments airing normally (seasonal breaks notwithstanding) one or two weeks after the last; ideally, such shows will continue for several years.¹² The extent to which television series may develop over time is epitomized by the genre of soap opera, which can yield many more episodes per year and, if popularity and viewer demand are maintained, may run for some decades. At the other end of the spectrum, many programs are one-off episodes (*Dr. Horrible's Sing-Along Blog*, though not explicitly conceived for television, is a case in point), while certain films are made specifically for television rather than the cinema; nevertheless, and doubtless owing in large part to the logistics of scheduling, the series increasingly became the prevalent mode for television broadcasting from the 1960s.¹³ Various cinematic antecedents also influenced television, perhaps the most obvious being the serial films historically shown in theaters alongside feature-length counterparts: flourishing in the 1910s with silent-era serials including *What Happened to Mary?* (1912) and *The Perils of Pauline* (1914), the genre enjoyed a revival in the 1930s and 1940s that resulted in the *Flash Gordon* series (1936–1940), *Buck Rogers* (1939), *Adventures of Captain Marvel* (1941), *Batman* (1943), *Superman* (1948), and many others. We must be careful, too, not to overlook the still-current tradition of films that give birth to sequels, although the appearance of such follow-ups is inevitably separated by years rather than weeks, and hence in a very real sense each stands apart from the others; that few modern films ultimately evolve beyond two or three sequels is surely indicative of the form's limited viability. It is surely no coincidence that some of the most famous franchises to have produced a more extended chain have attained a total number of films approximately equal to a full season of a U.S. television series; perhaps the best-known contemporary example, the James Bond canon, presently comprises twenty-two installments with the 2008 release of *Quantum of Solace*.

Many television series may at first glance seem more episodic than serial in the strictest sense of the word, but the point still stands that the inherently cumulative nature of successive installments (even in the case of ostensibly “stand-alone” episodes) is such that the overall product may be helpfully understood in terms of serial fiction in which the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.¹⁴ Notwithstanding the infelicitous tendency in much of the critical literature on television to insist too rigidly upon the series and the serial as two distinct categories, the hybridization and obfuscation of the boundaries between them have been

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recognized in certain quarters at least since the early 1990s.¹⁵ While a number of such studies have investigated in relative isolation the narrative structures offered by television,¹⁶ the relative absence of rigorous scholarly examination of the serialized aspect of television music has also led me to turn more widely to research on installment fiction and the conventions of serialization, which has crystallized around other forms such as the serialized novel, to provide the theoretical underpinnings necessary for its contemplation.¹⁷ The comparison is particularly apposite given that, as a recent study by Robert Giddings and Keith Selby has explored, the British Broadcasting Corporation initiated a long-standing tradition in the 1930s and 1940s of serializing and dramatizing classic novels, many of which had themselves started life as installment fiction (Dickens, Thackeray, Trollope, and Hardy were among the most prevalent authors) and were thus effectively reserialized for radio and television presentation.¹⁸ Parallels between nineteenth-century installment literature and contemporary television have been noted in scholarship on both forms;¹⁹ Rhonda Wilcox has explicitly drawn comparison between *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and the serialized novel and in particular the works of Dickens,²⁰ whose *Pickwick Papers* (1836–1837) marked a defining moment in the history of the genre.

Defined by the embargoed release of individual installments prior to the whole, serial fiction imposes restrictions on writers and readers alike. Under normal circumstances, it is impractical for any of its contributors substantively to revise material that has already received a public airing, or to alter previously established information (at least not without leaving themselves open to suggestions of backpedaling or “retroactive continuity”). Readers are similarly limited as to how they may engage with the product: they may freely refer back to installments that have previously appeared, but it is impossible for them to progress forward beyond a certain point. This arrangement results in a distinct reciprocity between the two: writers may respond, in later offerings, to public reaction to what is often effectively a periodically issued work in progress, while readers are enabled to speculate as to its possible continuation and conclusion (often leading to disappointment once its intended outcomes are ultimately revealed). Creative teams are famously required to work to strict deadlines in order to deliver their product on time; though film composers already operate within notoriously tight schedules, deadlines for their counterparts in television are typically measured in days

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rather than weeks. Broadcast series may additionally need to be adapted to accommodate unforeseen circumstances, such as cast members' conflicts with other commitments, illness, the 2007–2008 Writers Guild of America strike, and so forth. To the very real extent that television music participates in, enhances, and extends aspects of the narrative of its associated shows, any of these elements may have considerable implications for the content, if not also the form, of their score.

Another important feature of serial art is the requirement that individual installments be approximately equal in length, whether measured by the pages of a fascicle, the column inches of a periodical, or the minutes of a preexisting broadcast schedule. Prescribed formats have correspondingly evolved for episodes of television drama: as a general rule, they comprise an introductory “teaser,” the opening credits, a number of “acts” (normally four of unequal length, if the series is designed for a one-hour slot), and finally the closing credits. That itself imposes a particular structure upon each, partly to make room for commercial breaks but also to provide points of articulation for the narrative, necessitating a sense of trajectory within individual acts: all should open and close elegantly rather than abruptly, and many will end on a “cliffhanger” to maintain viewer interest until the show resumes.²¹ Not only are the overall narratives of television series disparate in their dispersal across months and years, then, but individual installments are themselves further subdivided, thereby lending an added significance to elements such as music that can provide unity across these various breaks. Even within the smaller spans of acts themselves, additional pointers are often required to prepare the viewer for the frequent changes of scene; sound may function to punctuate the narrative aurally in much the same way that clichéd shots of cityscape panoramas and building exteriors (the latter to introduce the site within which the ensuing action will take place) act as visual indicators. There are, of course, many additional musical implications of the serial nature of television shows. The requirement for a readily identifiable signature tune that in some way defines its attendant series, which will be heard week after week during its opening credits and may figure prominently within its score as well, is perhaps best saved for a separate study. Others include the music associated with any trailers to the episode prior to its being broadcast, the oft-encountered “previously on . . .” pre-teaser, any concluding “next time on . . .” sequence, and the signature shot (or sequence)

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that regularly appears by way of announcing an intermission for, or return from, a commercial break.

Certain recurring characteristics of serial fiction yield additional assumptions as to the organization and development of the narrative: those identified in Jennifer Hayward's study of the genre include "intertwined subplots," "dramatic plot reversals," and the "impossibility of closure."²² The continual generation of suspense to maintain consumers' interest and encourage them to return for the next installment of the work is especially important from the narratological perspective, since inconclusive elements are thereby incorporated within serial art by its very nature. That television episodes usually interweave a number of different, even unrelated, plots (sometimes as many as four in a single installment) also means that they are on the whole faster-paced than film, whose teleology tends to be more tightly focused toward a single goal and for which the need to hold the audience's attention is generally less pronounced. Their different pacing is also, of course, related to their scope: whereas the standard duration for a full-length episode of a U.S. television series is around forty-two to forty-six minutes (in order to fill a one-hour slot with commercials deemed relevant to the viewing demographic), feature films typically last an hour and a half at minimum, and many exceed two hours. As Roy Prendergast explained in the preliminary discussion of television music that appeared in the second edition (though not the first) of his landmark text *Film Music: A Neglected Art*, a hypothetical sequence lasting for a "leisurely" twenty to thirty seconds in film would be stripped down to a "rapid-fire" ten to twelve seconds in television.²³ Undoubtedly, the speed with which the narrative unfolds is considered very carefully in both media in pursuit of the desired aesthetic effect, with material culled from the final cut as necessary; nonetheless, the requirement to whittle down installments to a particular length in order to comply with the very precise constraints of broadcast schedules is specific to television. This aspect of editorial pacing is demonstrated effectively by the U.K. drama *Spooks* (2002–), episodes of which, already fast-moving at their original length of fifty-nine minutes (the BBC's U.K. channels do not air commercials), have subsequently been compressed to forty-four minutes for the show's presentation in the United States as *MI-5*. Likewise, such techniques as split-screening, which enables action to be displayed from several different viewpoints simultaneously rather than sequentially (and

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hence quickens the pace at which it advances), are far more common in contemporary television series than in film.

The counterpointing of a number of different stories within many television episodes warrants further contemplation in relation to the associated music. Typically, at least one of these plots would be exclusive to that particular broadcast, although—given the strong tradition of two-part episodes and, to a lesser extent, those tales divided across three or more installments—it may develop over slightly larger spans. Other plots, conversely, may participate in the establishment of the story arcs that often extend across the better part of, and sometimes beyond, their originating season. To read the narrative of a television score most fully therefore involves the understanding not just of short-term signifiers that operate across a single episode (possibly including its immediate neighbors), but also the longer-term ones that function over wider periods. The thematic scores for *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel* yield examples of both: perhaps the most recognizable in the first category (although it technically straddles two seasons) is “Sacrifice,” introduced in “The Gift” (B5.22) and returning in “Bargaining” (B6.1/2), while those of the second include the celebrated “Close Your Eyes (Buffy/Angel Love Theme),” “Buffy and Riley” theme, and “I’m Game,” all composed by Christophe Beck. An approach of this nature would seem to have been implicitly taken by Matthew Mills in an illuminating essay on the music of *Angel*, which included exploration of the “I’m Game” theme associated (at least primarily) with the ensouled vampire himself, as well as that heard in connection with the ill-fated Doyle, in the episode “Hero” (A1.9, scored by Christophe Beck and Robert J. Kral).²⁴ The former constitutes a long-term signifier, heard prominently in *Angel*’s opening show and intermittently in the five ensuing seasons; conversely, the latter is found in only a single installment—together with stray fragments in “Parting Gifts” (A1.10) two weeks later—and hence operated within a completely different timescale.²⁵ However, doubtless owing to restrictions of scope, Mills’s study falls short of considering the creative ways in which these different musical themes function in tandem: the climactic sequence of “Hero” features both *Angel*’s motif (hinted at 34’23”, with a fuller presentation at 35’38”) and Doyle’s (at 37’32”, 38’10”, and 39’06”), one giving way to the other to indicate which of the two characters is truly the episode’s titular protagonist and the “Promised One” of the Lister demons’ prophecy.²⁶

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It is this interrelationship between short- and long-term narrative agents that I am especially keen to probe in my own reading of “Hush.”

Prior to turning to an analysis of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* in earnest, we must briefly pay heed (as far as space allows) to the question of the validity of leitmotivic procedures in cinematic contexts, upon which matter much ink has previously been spent. Chief among the contributions is an influential critique by Theodor Adorno and Hanns Eisler, to which James Buhler has recently offered a particularly thought-provoking response in an article on the thematic construction of the scores for the original *Star Wars* trilogy. Whereas Adorno and Eisler’s concern stemmed from film music’s inherent discontinuity, which led, in their opinion, to its leitmotifs acting merely as musical “signposts” while failing to assume the wider structural and symbolic significance witnessed in Wagnerian music drama, Buhler argued that although the *Star Wars* themes that referred to the Dark Side (notably the “Imperial March”) are indeed used formulaically, those associated with the Force (such as the so-called “Force” theme itself) conversely attain mythic qualities.²⁷ Buhler’s demonstration that such music can function to differentiate between protagonists and antagonists cannot realistically be applied to *Buffy* and *Angel*, in which that binarism receives thorough deconstruction through figures such as Angel(us) and Willow.²⁸ If there are any general inferences to be drawn concerning the organization of leitmotifs in *Buffy* and *Angel*, perhaps the most easily defensible is that the best known of the former concern the relationship between characters (love themes having a long tradition in film), whereas those of the latter refer to a specific individual—doubtless reflecting that of the two, *Buffy* is more of an ensemble show. But Buhler’s point remains that the employment of leitmotivic techniques can participate in the creation and perpetuation of mythology on the screen as well as the stage (albeit implemented in quite different ways), revealing to the audience information unforthcoming from other narrative sources such as words and dramatic action, as we shall presently see with respect to *Buffy*. Moreover, such mythology is potentially more extensively developed on television, where it may flourish across episodes and seasons and hence establish a more sophisticated semiotic nexus than that possible at the cinema. Michael Giacchino’s score for *Alias*, for instance, includes themes not just for principal characters such as criminal mastermind-turned-humanitarian Arvin Sloane, but also a mysterious five-note leitmotif for

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Milo Rambaldi, the (fictional) Renaissance technological prophet whose mythic artifacts form a basis for the show's synopsis.

Scholarly opinion is similarly divided over the crucial ethnographic question as to whether the narrative intricacies of music for film and television are (insofar as it is ever possible definitively to determine the meanings of art) correctly understood and decoded by the listeners—and, indeed, whether it is even intended that they should be. Claudia Gorbman famously wrote of film scores in terms of their not (normally) being actively heard,²⁹ a view that has since been implicitly countered by Jeff Smith in demonstrating that such music is imbued not just with important narrative functions but commercial ones too.³⁰ Certainly the recent proliferation of film and television soundtrack releases, which effectively furnish the viewer with a repository of their most cherished music—and often also identify their narrative significance through the track listing or liner notes—have explicitly drawn attention to their thematic cues in ways that fundamentally call Gorbman's contention into question. Inevitably some audience members will be more musically aware than others, who might instead focus on parameters such as acting, directing, editing, mise-en-scène, dialogue, and plot. But since all are integral to the multimedia texts of television and film, all are active participants in the construction of its meaning and none should therefore be ignored; consequently, critical inquiry that centralizes music, in tandem with these other elements, will contribute to a greater understanding of the overall narrative. In the case of serial art, as various recent studies have shown, additional possibilities exist for feedback from (even dialogue with) one's interpretive community. Hence if the significance of a given use of music has engendered viewers' interest for the right reasons, then it becomes elevated to the level of a recognized convention that can be knowingly deployed and subverted in the future; conversely, if the intended meaning does not seem to have received widespread acknowledgment, the show's creative team is empowered to respond by according it greater prominence in forthcoming episodes.

Most importantly, when analogous musical signifiers appear in different contexts, they offer the potential to induce audience members who have observed the similarity to compare the contexts as well, and hence they may participate in the accretion of narratological meaning.³¹ A thematic score is by no means the only possible site in which such musical cross-references may be located. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* yields

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a non-leitmotivic example that is especially fascinating for the temporal distance separating successive occurrences: as Jacqueline Bach discusses in this volume, in the episode “Band Candy” (B3.6), during which Giles and Joyce are uncharacteristically intimate, they hang out at Giles’s place while enjoying Cream’s “Tales of Brave Ulysses” in the diegetic background; over two seasons later, the viewer witnesses Giles’s listening to the same musical excerpt some time after Joyce’s funeral in “Forever” (B5.17). In other instances, often owing to the constraints of time and budget and the practice of repeating in different episodes what K. J. Donnelly has termed “musical blocks,” narratological red herrings can emerge.³² The same emotive cue by Thomas Wanker is heard as Willow prepares to enter the mind of the comatose Buffy through magical means in “The Weight of the World” (B5.21, from 14'01”), as Buffy cuts her hair in “Gone” (B6.11, from 11'26”), and as Anya rehearses her wedding vows, while Xander wanders aimlessly through the rain, in “Hell’s Bells” (B6.16, from 25'47”); but there is no clearly discernible reason why these three scenes admit comparison other than that all are, in the broadest sense, emblematic of (widely spaced) poignant moments for (different) protagonists—they do not even all fall within the same programming season. However, and without wishing to become further embroiled in debates as to what constitutes a “genuine” leitmotif,³³ the point is surely that a rich tradition of deploying musical cues that do possess clear narrative functions has evolved within television shows, a practice that would surely not have retained its value through recent decades were the target audience wholly unaware of their significance. For example, the use of a “Laura Palmer” theme in Angelo Badalamenti’s score for *Twin Peaks* (1990–1991) is well known; the comedy value of *Ally McBeal* is enhanced by a profusion of recurring “soundtrack games” (to borrow Julie Brown’s formulation), among the most obvious being Ling Woo’s “Wicked Witch of the West” cue and John Cage’s association with Barry White’s “You’re the First, the Last, My Everything” and the music of *Rocky*;³⁴ and a recent BBC Promenade concert (Royal Albert Hall, London, July 27, 2008) based around the revived *Doctor Who* series brought the thematic structuring of Murray Gold’s incidental music to public notice in a particularly novel way.

The evidence in the case of the leitmotivic scores for *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel* is more compelling still. Fans’ attention has been drawn to their more important themes in that “Close Your Eyes” was featured on

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one tie-in CD, “Sacrifice” on another, and “I’m Game” on a third;³⁵ one volume of the show’s authorized companion, *The Watcher’s Guide*, even reproduced the first few bars of the notated “Close Your Eyes” and “Buffy and Riley” themes.³⁶ Internal evidence from the series themselves reveals certain moments in the narrative that (in a manner broadly analogous to Wagner’s own leitmotifs) are only fully explained by non-diegetic music: in “The Yoko Factor” (B4.20), for instance, as Riley hears scattered reports on his radio of a hostile threat that his military comrades are unable to neutralize, only a subtle, augmented manifestation of the “I’m Game” theme in the score (23’25”) confirms to the viewer at this juncture that Angel has arrived in Sunnydale and is making his presence felt there.³⁷ This was, of course, a musical cue previously presented exclusively on *Angel*; likewise, when Buffy made her first crossover appearance in the spin-off show, in “I Will Remember You” (A1.8), “Close Your Eyes” migrated with her.³⁸ But while some such themes are especially familiar, others—which are perhaps more sparingly deployed, and less significant overall to the shows in that they do not concern their eponymous protagonists—do not seem to have received mainstream acknowledgment. One is the love theme for Giles and Jenny, heard repeatedly in “Passion” (B2.17) and tied to its tragic events, and later used in “I Only Have Eyes for You” (B2.19) and “Becoming, Part 2” (B2.22), notwithstanding the death of one of its associated characters. Another is that for Willow and Oz, which came to prominence at the end of “Wild at Heart” (B4.6), in which Oz leaves Sunnydale, and toward the opening of “Something Blue” (B4.9), during which Willow struggles to come to terms with his departure; it was brought back some months later in “New Moon Rising” (B4.19), when Oz’s unexpected return presents a challenge to Willow’s blossoming relationship with Tara. The scope of this study does not, alas, permit more comprehensive exploration of these particular avenues.

Arguably the most celebrated and musically developed theme in the two combined series is that for Buffy and Riley, introduced in the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* episode to which we shall now turn by way of applying the theoretical foundations set out above to a specific case study. As a distinctive example of a television program awash with music on a number of different levels, “Hush” (B4.10, written and directed by Joss Whedon) exceptionally includes nearly half an hour of material devoid of spoken dialogue: its synopsis is that “the Gentlemen”—an ominous

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group of fairy-tale demons with pale skin, bald heads, and smart Victorian attire, who float effortlessly above the ground accompanied by straitjacketed footmen—steal the voices of residents across the town in order that they might harvest the hearts of seven unsuspecting individuals without making a sound. In effectively “speaking” for the silenced characters, Christophe Beck’s score for “Hush” is elevated to the textual foreground in a manner rarely encountered in television. Its music thus participates in the episode’s wider conceptual theme of nonverbal communication, firmly established in the opening scene in which Professor Maggie Walsh tells her class (and by extension, the viewer) that some “thoughts and experiences” simply cannot be expressed using language.³⁹ “Hush” consequently explores aspects of the lives of several major cast members that are problematized by a lack of effective communication: Buffy and Riley lend new meaning to the word “babblefest” in talking inarticulately about all the wrong topics but avoiding mention of their developing yet apparently forbidden romantic interest in each other; Xander procrastinates over discussing the nature of his relationship with Anya, who, in her inimitably frank manner, accuses him of caring little for her beyond the sexual gratification she offers; and Willow meets with little success when attempting to explain to her newfound Wicca group that being a genuine practitioner of witchcraft might actually involve casting spells. Recalling previous discussions as to serial fiction’s being characterized by the interweaving of plots and the establishment of cross-installment arcs, “Hush” yields an ideal model of an episode involving a combination of short- and long-term story lines, complete with their corresponding musical cues. While the tale involving the Gentlemen is central, and exclusive to “Hush,” a number of more protracted stories (Buffy and Riley, Xander and Anya, Willow and Tara) are also advanced, whose narrative implications ultimately extend to much of the remaining three and a half seasons of the show’s run. As we shall see, the ways in which these different plots interact within “Hush” are highly illuminating in terms of the incidental music with which they are associated.

Before we examine the score in earnest, however, two other important instances in which music features in “Hush” require brief exploration for their integration within the explanation of the main story line, and which are therefore impossible to ignore. The episode’s most obvious manifestation, indeed, concerns the diegetic use of a preexisting work, during the

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scene in which Giles serves up the fruits of his research to Buffy, Xander, Willow, and Anya. Being unable to speak at this point in the story, Giles delivers his presentation using a series of acetate slides while playing an abridged recording of Camille Saint-Saëns's renowned *Danse macabre* (1874). Based on a poem by Henri Cazalis depicting a midnight graveside setting in which skeletons dance to a tune played by Death himself on the violin, Saint-Saëns's pictorial composition has become a standard piece with which to represent the diabolical and otherworldly, and its appearance in "Hush" clearly functions intertextually. Moreover, as the appendix at the end of this chapter illustrates, in documenting each shot along with the matching passage in the score of *Danse macabre* and providing commentary on the relationship between them, the sequence is judiciously crafted such that the music articulates both Giles's projector slides and the onscreen action in general—hence testifying to the considerable level of care given to the use of music, and its interaction with the plot, images, and editing, throughout the episode.⁴⁰ The musical climaxes (bars 370 f. and 430 f.) correspond both to the gruesome peak of Giles's presentation (the projector slide of a victim's heart being extracted, at shot 26) and Willow's mime representing the death of the Gentlemen (shots 47–49), before merging seamlessly into Christophe Beck's score at the end of the scene. Likewise, the double-placement of Giles's first slide (in reverse in shot 5, and the correct way round in shot 10) synchronized with the commencement of *Danse macabre's* main theme (bar 85) and its immediate repetition (bar 93) acts as a manifesto for the coordination with the music, which, as may be seen from the commentary provided in the appendix, pervades the whole sequence. Giles's last slide, and specifically Buffy's reaction to his drawing of her, coincides with the solo violin music of the work's coda (shot 56 / bar 455), which relates to the point in Cazalis's poem at which the cockerel crows to indicate daybreak—thereby identifying Buffy with the deathly protagonist of *Danse macabre* and hinting that she, rather than the Gentlemen, will ultimately be the one to bring about the demise of the other. Such elements might, particularly in view of the scene's three-minute timescale, suggest some consonance with the conventions of music video, whose significance to television drama has previously been noted in alluding to the frequency of MTV-style montages. Given that *Danse macabre* is a nineteenth-century classical piece rather than a contemporary pop song, however, its diegetic employment within this scene is much

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more distinctive; in this respect, it may be better understood within the context of the use of preexisting art music in, for example, Stanley Kubrick's oeuvre, which Michel Chion has interpreted as a nod toward the historical silent film.⁴¹ As the appendix's commentary shows, it is certainly replete with the trademark visual humor—such as Buffy, Willow, and Anya's correcting Giles's mistake in placing his first slide back to front on the projector—in ways that delineate the male and female characters and encourage the viewer to side with the latter. Consequently, the episode's generally sexually charged nature is epitomized by this scene in ways only made possible by its exclusion of dialogue: when Willow points to her chest to indicate the body part sought after by the Gentlemen (shot 14), Xander immediately thinks of “boobies”; and Buffy's ambiguous gesture intended to indicate staking (shot 35, coincident with bar 394) is universally (mis)interpreted as imitative of male masturbation.

The second means by which diegetic music centrally participates in the processes that identify the principal plot of “Hush” to the viewer occurs at the episode's outset. As the initial scene is revealed to be one of Buffy's fabled prophecy dreams, information about the Gentlemen is communicated to her by a small girl's innocently singing a simple pseudo-nursery rhyme comprising little more than an alternation between two notes.⁴² The traditional alignment of music with the fantastical receives frequent articulation within both *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel*, among the more prominent examples being the musical demon of “Once More, With Feeling,” the lycanthropy of band musicians Oz and Veruca, Lorne's ability to discern people's destinies but only when they sing, and the rich score (not to mention the “Exposition Song”) of the dream sequences of “Restless.” More importantly, in the opening sequence of “Hush,” we initially hear just the child's voice; only immediately prior to establishing visual contact do we start to discern the words intoned by the young *chanteuse*. The connection on television between a wordless, disembodied, female voice and the “exotic” otherworldly extends at least as far back as Alexander Courage's signature tune to the original incarnation of *Star Trek* (1966–1969), and, as Linda Phyllis Austern has noted, analogous cultural tropes can ultimately be traced to ancient Greek mythology.⁴³ The concept is employed again in the angular theme connected in the score with the Gentlemen, who (significantly) are themselves silent onscreen and are ultimately neutralized not by the conventional

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stake through the heart, but by Buffy's screaming once her voice has returned. In terms of its pitch configuration, meanwhile, the Gentlemen's theme draws on the long-standing musical associations of the exotic with semitones and chromaticism, and (to some extent) that of the supernatural with the interval of a tritone, the so-called *diabolus in musica*—one key intertext being *Danse macabre* itself, owing to its celebrated use of solo violin *scordatura*. Strains of the theme, particularly the “sighing” semitones with which it commences (and their wordless voices), permeate the episode's score, punctuating the Gentlemen's onscreen appearances and other junctures; notably, it is interspersed with the otherwise generic music of the final fight scene from 37'31".⁴⁴ Its fullest presentation occurs at 23'11", as the Gentlemen intrude upon the UC Sunnydale campus to claim their latest victim; a skeletal transcription of the opening of this cue (whose texture is adorned by celesta in imitation of a child's musical box) is shown in example 2.1.⁴⁵

In addition to this localized theme (which, being unique to “Hush,” more readily admits comparison with the familiar, self-contained uses of non-diegetic music in film), the score also provides narration on the awkwardness of the developing relationship between Buffy and Riley, the twin subjects of a major story arc that was to unfold over the next twenty-two episodes. Prior to the events of “Hush,” each protagonist had been vigilantly guarding his or her true identity from the other: while college student Buffy moonlights as the titular vampire slayer, Riley, who masquerades as a graduate teaching assistant by day, is in reality a military commando medically enhanced to combat the forces of evil as part of a top-secret government operation known as the Initiative. The fact that they are essentially on the same side would indeed legitimize their budding romance, and their secrets nearly slip out at the start of the episode; but these are topics that are of necessity off-limits, for fear of exposing themselves and endangering others. Their problematized relationship is underpinned by the earliest appearances on the show of the “Buffy and

Slow
Wordless voices
Strings
(outline of harmony)
Horn
Bass

Example 2.1. “The Gentlemen’s” theme, fullest presentation (opening only), 23’11”

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Example 2.2. "Buffy and Riley" theme, initial presentation (opening), 20'49"

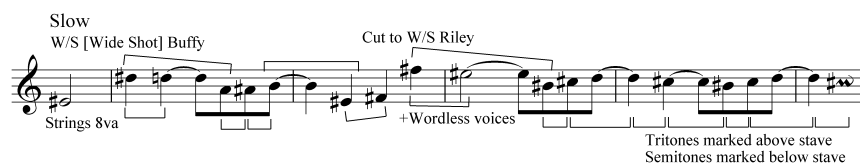


Example 2.3. "Buffy and Riley" theme, abridged presentation, 39'00"

Riley" theme: introduced upon their first meeting after having lost their voices to nuance the tender moment during which they kiss (the first half of the cue is transcribed in example 2.2), it is heard again, in abridged form, immediately after they have worked together to vanquish the malevolent demons (example 2.3).

That the latter instance marks the endpoint of the episode's culminating action sequence (just as Wagnerian leitmotifs function to structural as well as symbolic ends) itself evidences the interface between short- and long-term narratives; still greater insights are contributed by an additional presentation of a version of the "Buffy and Riley" theme, located between the two previously mentioned and in a different key. This interim cue is recognizably set within the musical context of the Gentlemen's theme, in terms both of its spacious string accompaniment and the metamorphosis of the melody such that it is now constructed from semitones and tritones (as annotated in example 2.4)—whose association with the Gentlemen is established at other junctures in the episode—rather than the diatonic intervals of the original.

Though its corresponding images cut between shots of Buffy and Riley, this is the only occurrence of the theme in "Hush" during which the



Example 2.4. Metamorphosis of "Buffy and Riley" theme (melody only), 29'49"

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two are not in each other's company, for they are pursuing the Gentlemen independently at this point. In view of its connotations elsewhere coupled to its new musical setting, the score would seem to be adding an extra layer to the narrative in anticipating the episode's outcome (albeit one that viewers might reasonably have predicted): that the pair will run into each other in pursuing their goal of finding and defeating the Gentlemen, and that this encounter will help to resolve the tension in their relationship resulting from their secret identities.

The nature of several broadly comparable bonds between cast members are also probed during the course of the episode. "Hush" marks the only appearance of Giles's mysterious friend Olivia apart from the season's opener and (in a dream sequence only) its finale, and the silencing of the characters' voices is hence narratologically convenient for its precluding exploration of questions that are never satisfactorily answered as to her identity, her exact relationship to Giles, and her wider role within the show's story lines. Xander and Anya's reconciliation following their (verbal) argument at the start of the episode, moreover, is potentially more informative in terms of the function specifically played by the score. Xander's actions in attacking Spike, who he erroneously believes has bitten Anya (a misunderstanding that would doubtless have been avoided had they been able to talk to each other), cause his girlfriend to realize what words alone could not express: that he does indeed have romantic feelings for her. But Anya's response is a coquettish hand-gesture that merely suggests more sex—the very point that generated their rift in the first place. The moment is, however, inflected by a musical cue connoting—in an ironic, almost humorous, manner—a grand filmic gesture of love (example 2.5); indeed, in terms both of string sonority and melodic contour (opening with a descending second, subsequently followed by a rising stepwise third), it may even have been intended as a tangential allusion to the "Buffy and Riley" theme itself. Only the score, then, truly

The musical score is written on a single staff in treble clef with a key signature of three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat). The tempo is marked 'Very slow'. The score begins with a harp glissando, indicated by a wavy line and the text '(Introduced by harp gliss.)'. This is followed by a chordal texture labeled 'Strings (outline of harmony)'. A melodic line for 'Strings 8va' is shown above the staff, starting with a descending second interval. A 'Horn' part is also indicated, with notes appearing below the staff. The score concludes with a final chord and a double bar line.

Example 2.5. Xander and Anya reconcile, 35'13"

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explicates the meaning of this scene as a loving reunion that sets Anya's mind at rest regarding their relationship.

The final coupling examined in "Hush" represents a further instance of interaction between short- and long-term signifiers, though for somewhat different reasons. "Hush" witnessed the introduction of the character of Tara, written into the show as a love interest for Willow (though the timing of her appearance was precipitated by the departure from the regular cast of Seth Green as Oz) and apparently the only other genuine witch among the "bunch of wanna-blessed-bes" she had earlier encountered. The episode also yielded the initial indications of the lesbian relationship that was to emerge between the two, at a pivotal moment where sapphism, sorcery, and silence converge. Various associations between lesbianism and witchcraft have been established during the course of the show: further on in the fourth season, the word "witch" was used as a coded substitute for "lesbian" in reference to Willow and Tara's relationship, just as "singing" briefly became a euphemism for "[lesbian] sex" in "Once More, With Feeling"; and the female constituency of Wiccans (the term is not in reality gender-specific) might itself be construed as an implicit lesbian subtext.⁴⁶ It was a connection largely initiated by "Hush," during which Tara seeks out Willow (ostensibly) to enact magic to bring everybody's voices back—but the pair run into the Gentlemen and their attendant footmen. Being incapable of casting spells vocally, and since neither sorceress is yet powerful enough to save herself, they intuitively combine their supernatural abilities with a symbolic holding of hands—yet they do not let go of each other when the spell is complete. Within the context of a fast-moving, generic cue that enhances the suspense as Willow and Tara attempt to elude the Gentlemen by barricading themselves into a laundry room, the scene is articulated by two strains of the Gentlemen's theme, which—recalling Carolyn Abbate's contention that particular musical gestures constitute fleeting "moments of narration . . . like voices from elsewhere"⁴⁷—occur specifically at the two physical manifestations of the lesbian bond that the pair were subsequently to develop. The rhythmic editing of musical material with onscreen action at the points central to this narrative (annotated in example 2.6)—especially the coincidence of the first appearance of the Gentlemen's theme with the shot of Tara's hand moving toward Willow's—implicitly invites comparison between the Gentlemen and the two witches (for example, in terms of the strength in numbers that both groups embody and the mysticism that unites

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The image shows two staves of musical notation. The top staff is marked 'Allegro, in quavers' and 'Strings tremolo'. It includes parts for Horn, Bass, and Horn. Annotations include: 'Cut to CU [Close-Up] Willow, attempting to cast spell' and '(Repeated cuts between Willow, Tara, and drinks machine)'. The bottom staff is marked '(Ensemble in unison)' and 'GENTLEMEN'S THEME'. Annotations include: 'In a series of shots, Tara grasps Willow's hand fully', 'Their head movement is synchronized as they look in the direction of the door', 'Drinks machine hits door at this point', 'Cuts between CU Willow and CU Tara (still holding hands)', and 'Strings 8va (in imitation of voices)'. A final annotation reads: 'Wordless voices GENTLEMEN'S THEME' and 'Tara's hand moves towards Willow's hand'.

Example 2.6. Willow and Tara elude the Gentlemen, 36'05"

them) as well as serving to remind the viewer of the situation that brought Willow and Tara together in the first place.

“Hush” therefore provides an enlightening illustration of the ways in which television score may participate in the narrative both within the confines of a discrete episode, and more widely across episodes and seasons. The Gentlemen’s theme, while it has implications for the music that adorns the exploration of two romantic couplings, itself constitutes a short-term signifier not encountered in subsequent installments; indeed, the use of this material to add nuance to the earliest suggestions of the emergent relationship between Willow and Tara may go some way toward explaining why they (unlike Willow’s previous love interest) did not receive a consistently appearing non-diegetic cue. Conversely, the story arc of the romance between Buffy and Riley, for which “Hush” is pivotal, extended throughout the fourth season and some way into the fifth—complete with their musical theme in various guises. Its redeployment cannot simply be ascribed to external factors such as the show’s tight production schedules; Christophe Beck has even stated for the record that he felt the theme to be “difficult to reuse.”⁴⁸ Yet its association with the two protagonists is prominently articulated in the very next episode, “Doomed” (B4.11), in which it features, whether completely or in truncated form, on a total of five occasions, all but one of which are in the same key; by way of demonstration, the music with which each opens has been charted alongside its narrative context in Table 2.1, with the three presentations in “Hush” included for comparison.

Several further instances occur in “Goodbye Iowa” (B4.14), mainly connected with Buffy’s caring for Riley as he suffers the physical symptoms of withdrawal from the Initiative’s medication; appearances are likewise



Table 2.1. Occurrences of the “Buffy and Riley” theme in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, “Hush” (4.10) and “Doomed” (4.11)

EPISODE, START TIME	NARRATIVE CONTEXT	TRANSCRIPTION OF OPENING OF MUSIC
“Hush”, 20’49”	Buffy and Riley meet in town after having lost their voices, and embrace	
“Hush”, 29’51”	Buffy and Riley pursue the Gentlemen, independently	
“Hush”, 39’00”	Buffy and Riley look at one another at the end of the fight with the Gentlemen	
“Doomed”, 3’38”	Buffy and Riley discuss their secret identities and agree that they need time to come to terms with these revelations	

(continued)





Table 2.1. (continued)

EPISODE, START TIME	NARRATIVE CONTEXT	TRANSCRIPTION OF OPENING OF MUSIC
"Doomed", 21'41"	Buffy tells Riley that a relationship between them would not work; Riley tries to persuade her otherwise, to no avail	
"Doomed", 22'47"	Having rejected Riley, Buffy leaves [codetta to the previous cue]	
"Doomed", 29'32"	Riley tells Buffy to give their relationship a try, only to be rejected again	
"Doomed", 40'56"	At the end of the episode, Buffy calls round to see Riley; they kiss	



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identifiable in “This Year’s Girl” (B4.15), “Superstar” (B4.17), and “The Yoko Factor” (B4.20), and further allusions may be heard in the appoggiatura motifs underscoring Buffy and Riley’s sex scenes in “Where the Wild Things Are” (B4.18). Conversely, it is absent from “Who Are You” (B4.16), in which, unknown to Riley, “Buffy” is not Buffy at all—Faith, the “rogue” vampire slayer, has forcibly occupied her body. The compositional “voice” in which the score was written changed discernibly at the start of the fifth season, at which point Thomas Wanker replaced Christophe Beck as in-house composer; but the idiosyncratic theme nevertheless continued to be used as one of the show’s established narratological conventions, as is a semistandard practice in team-composed musical multimedia.⁴⁹ It reasserted itself in “Out of My Mind” (B5.4) and particularly in “Into the Woods” (B5.10), the cue for the scene of Riley’s departure from Sunnydale (from 38’22”), incorporating several strains of the theme, fantasia-like, as if apotheosizing both the music and the ultimately doomed relationship between its two attendant characters. In total, the theme accrued some twenty independent, and readily recognizable, occurrences over at least eight of the episodes to have originally aired in the calendar year between “Hush” and “Into the Woods” inclusive. It would doubtless have been further utilized had actor Marc Blucas not left the regular cast, which evidences the ways in which the narratives of serial fiction are required to adapt to external circumstances and how the associated music can become directly affected. Even Blucas’s subsequent guest appearance in “As You Were” (B6.15) did not yield sufficient grounds to resurrect the theme, doubtless reflecting that the now-married Riley had moved on in the intervening period.

The above analysis offers only a modest cross-section of the fascinating and rich evidence in support of my reading of the original score for *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, but it nonetheless highlights the significant repercussions for the music of the different narrative frameworks provided by the medium of television in comparison to film. We are now enabled to recognize that Roy Prendergast’s contention that the former is faster-paced represents only half of the story. Television may indeed move substantially more quickly than film across individual episodes, especially given the previously noted expectation of any serialized work that each of its installments will draw the narrative to an elegant (though not necessarily conclusive) close. The segment of “Hush” in which the musical cues discussed above are located, bookended broadly by the outer presentations

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of the “Buffy and Riley” theme, took place in its entirety within the space of less than twenty minutes;⁵⁰ recalling Prendergast’s arguments, it would surely have been developed over a period perhaps twice as long had it appeared within a film instead. At the same time, however, the story arc concerning the rise and fall of Buffy and Riley’s relationship unfolded over much wider temporal spans, not just in terms of the cumulative duration of all the relevant episodes (three of which would be more or less sufficient to match the length of many films) but also considering the show’s broadcast history, given that its installments aired at intervals of a week or more across the programming season. From the perspective of the show’s earliest viewers, then, that particular plotline emerged gradually over a period of months—as was its original conception as serial art. As Linda Hughes and Michael Lund have argued in the context of Victorian literature, installment fiction is more completely understood through contemplation of its initially serial format and its corresponding periodicity, since later presentations (notably the republication of the whole as a novel) have significantly altered the reader’s interpretation of the text.⁵¹ The point is confirmed by internal evidence from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel* such as the occasional allusions to the former’s Tuesday evening broadcast slot (Buffy’s line “So, Dawn’s in trouble. Must be Tuesday” in “Once More, With Feeling” is a case in point⁵²) and Lorne’s postmodern remark at the start of Act 3 of *Angel*’s “Spin the Bottle” (A4.6): “Well, those were some exciting products. Am I right? Mm. Let’s all think about buying some of those.”⁵³ Even subsidiary channels on which such shows subsequently air in installments will fit them into their own schedules and may place commercial breaks in the “wrong” places as well—thereby compromising the meaning of dialogue such as the above and inadvertently repartitioning episodes originally designed to adhere closely to the four-act model, for instance “Restless” (B4.22), “The Body” (B5.10), and “Life Serial” (B6.5).

The disclosure of story lines over such protracted time frames raises another issue crucial to the narratology of serial fiction: that of recapitulation. In view of recent technological advances—the proliferation of domestic video recording equipment (the more advanced of which can even be set to record new episodes in a series automatically), the possibilities for obtaining digital downloads after the initial broadcast, and the prevalence of detailed show synopses in magazines and online—as well as the long-standing U.S. tradition of simply repeating the previous week’s episode

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of a series in its regular slot if no new one has yet become available, it is now easier than ever for the interested viewer to catch up on missed installments. But the digital revolution also brought with it competition for ratings on an unprecedented scale, as the increased range of channels made securing a healthy share of the active television audience even more challenging. As with other forms of serial art, one key function of the sustaining of suspense through, and beyond, individual episodes is to encourage potential devotees to continue with a given series rather than to abandon it and direct their attention elsewhere instead. The choice of channels, and the ease of switching between them particularly at commercial breaks, makes this a special concern of television. Recapitulation is therefore necessary not just to remind a show's regular following of previous plot developments, but more importantly, to provide first-time and on-and-off watchers with sufficient background information to be able to engage with the latest installment, so as not to limit the potential audience disproportionately. Indeed, story arcs have become so intricate, and integral, to cult television drama that certain shows have based whole episodes around their summary by way of enhancing accessibility to such demographics. Recent examples that have been heavily geared toward the recounting of plots advanced in previous installments include *Alias*'s "Q&A" (1.17) and various out-of-sequence clip shows for *Lost* (2004–2010), as well as "Lab Rats" (7.20) in *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* (2000–), whose musical cues connected to the "Miniature Killer" story arc possess a distinctly eerie timbre that itself lends them a leitmotivic quality.

In general, such recapitulation is much more easily effected with respect to the plot than to the score. One important rhetorical device that has developed to ensure that unacquainted viewers possess the necessary knowledge of the backstory is the inclusion of "redundant" dialogue between principal characters, typically toward the start of an episode, in which such background is discussed; Xander's conversation with Anya about her past life as a vengeance demon, at the opening of Act 1 of "The Prom" (B3.20) (Anya's third appearance on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, and her first for some weeks), yields a good illustration. To a lesser extent, the phenomenon is observable at the beginning of other acts and scenes too, conveniently accommodating the needs of any viewers whose attentions are divided or who have joined the broadcast partway through, as well as the inevitable interruptions to the flow of the narrative created by

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commercial breaks. The opening “previously on . . .” sequence that has become a staple of the television drama series, moreover, has direct implications for the score and the limitations of its meanings since the heavy cutting involved in condensing the original clips to the modest proportions required for such a lead-in often obscures the significance of the music with which they were originally associated. For instance, as Matthew Mills has discussed, the teaser for *Angel*’s “War Zone” (A1.20) artfully applies the “I’m Game” theme to Gunn instead of Angel, thereby momentarily tricking the viewer into believing that the trenchcoat-wearing figure from whom the vampires are running is the eponymous hero himself.⁵⁴ Yet this is a subtlety lost in subsequent “previously on . . .” reediting: while it serves to remind the audience of Gunn and his street-gang background, the use of “I’m Game” itself is obscured, hence offering few clues as to music’s original participation in this implicit comparison between the two demon-fighting protagonists. The score, therefore, must adopt other strategies if it is to maximize the possibilities for the viewers’ interpretation of its themes across different episodes.

Consideration of “Hush,” and the episode that succeeded it, “Doomed,” is again indicative. In terms of the world of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, the two take place immediately one after the other: the teaser for “Doomed” even continues the closing scene of “Hush,” the unease between Buffy and Riley indicating the resumption of their previous difficulties in talking to each other. From the point of view of the original broadcast schedule, however, the two installments were separated by the comparatively long period of five weeks, having aired either side of the seasonal break (on December 14, 1999, and January 18, 2000, respectively)—one reason, no doubt, why “Hush” represented such a pivotal and suspense-filled episode, activating a number of important new directions for the show’s various story lines. But although the sense of anticipation generated by such an installment would have functioned to maintain viewer interest during the intervening period prior to the appearance of the next episode, the “Buffy and Riley” theme itself would surely have been forgotten by the vast majority of those who had initially noticed its significance. That may explain why, having gone some way toward establishing it through three presentations in relatively quick succession in the course of “Hush,” “Doomed” built upon these foundations (as Table 2.2 reveals) by furnishing a further five instances—a level of repetition analogous to that of a scriptwriter endeavoring to create a new

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catchphrase for a given character. A more pronounced example of the same procedure is yielded by the opening episode of *Angel*, “City Of” (A1.1), in which the fanfarelike principal motif of the “I’m Game” theme occurs some fifteen times in under forty minutes.

In view of the broad periods over which television series are disseminated—not to mention the enforced intermissions within individual installments brought about by the commercial breaks—we might reasonably expect them to contain a greater level of recapitulation of the narrative and its corresponding music than in an essentially stand-alone medium such as film. Yet it is increasingly becoming an industry standard to release whole seasons or half-seasons on DVD (or, earlier, videocassette) upon the conclusion of their initial airing on their associated television network, thus facilitating the viewing of episodes immediately one after another and the skipping backward and forward at will. The advent of digital television and the concomitant expansion of available channels has also led to the rise, at least in the U.K., of traditions of presenting the next installment on a subsidiary channel immediately after the first has aired; and, particularly on the newly emerged specialist channels, a show’s reruns may air episodes on adjacent days or even present several in succession in a single evening. These practices are, of course, all quite alien to the segmented, serial-format nature of television shows as released systematically over significant temporal spans; the original broadcast scheduling proves especially dear to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel*, in which the numerous crossovers and plot tie-ins assume a precise viewing order so as most fully to comprehend all aspects of the episodes’ narratives, including the music.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, and particularly from the perspective of establishing canons of television series that are thereby made available to future viewers, DVDs represent the definitive multimedia text, devoid of commercials as well as any additional mediation on the part of specific channels (including editing for content), which can inadvertently render a carefully crafted score nonsensical.⁵⁶ Comparison of television shows with analogous forms such as the serialized novel—whose subsequent reprints and ultimate single-volume publication have clear parallels in television reruns and DVD releases respectively—hence becomes even more apposite. The adaptation of scholarship on the narrative structures to which other serialized works adhere may offer one valuable direction through which to shed new light on the whole area of music for television in the future.



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Given these industry developments, a slightly different picture of the relationship between television and film has recently materialized, one that suggests it is now potentially more straightforward critically to interpret the former medium and its associated music—and not merely because of its being typically faster-paced within specific scenes and sections. For Matthew Mills, the use of leitmotivic techniques in television series represents “an important point of mnemonic reference not only during each discrete episode but also between episodes whose viewing may be separated by longer spans of time.”⁵⁷ The difficulties of actively recalling the narratological subtleties of a particular show that have historically been connected with their unfolding over comparatively long periods are, however, presently being negated by their being increasingly released in formats that render superfluous the built-in recapitulation of individual acts and installments. The weeks, months, and years of programming schedules are instead condensed into the hours of back-to-back, commercial-free playing time of (often very reasonably priced) DVD box sets, which enable the engagement with television series even decades after their original airing and presuppose repeat viewing on a previously unparalleled scale. Now more than ever, then, music for television reveals itself as a fascinating and illuminating object for scholarly study.

* * *

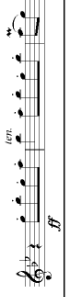

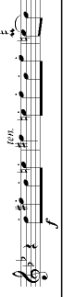
This chapter has its origins in two conference papers: “I Believe the Subtext Here Is Rapidly Becoming Text’: Music, Gender, and Fantasy in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*,” delivered at the Universities of London (December 7, 2001), Warwick (May 11, 2002), and East Anglia (October 20, 2002); and “Reading Television (Under)score: The Music of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*,” delivered at Keele University (March 18, 2005) and City University London (May 4, 2005). My work has benefited from a number of fruitful conversations, over the years, with Matthew Mills, Ben Winters, Ian Davis, and James Longstaffe; I am particularly grateful to Ben Winters and Matthew Mills for their invaluable comments on drafts of this essay. Thanks are also due to James Longstaffe for checking my transcriptions; to Kendra Preston Leonard for her helpful editorial guidance; to Laura Laakso for many hours of viewing companionship; and to the staff and students at City University London for much thought-provoking comment and critique.

Appendix 2.1.1. Tabular analysis of the *Danse macabre* scene from "Hush" (*Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, 4.10)




Shot no.	Time	Camera Shot/Description of Action	Projector Slide	Diegetic Music (with excerpts)	Commentary
1	0'00" (time from start of episode: 26:41')	W/S [Wide Shot] LECTURE THEATRE (from back at side, panning to front) Xander closes window shutters in preparation for slide show Xander, Anya, Buffy, and Willow take their seats to watch Giles's presentation (Buffy and Willow sit next to one another; Anya in the row behind; Xander on the steps just in front) Giles pulls down the projector screen and walks round the desk at the front of the Lecture Theatre		(None)	
2	0'14" (26'55")	M/S [Medium Shot] GILES Giles, standing in front of the desk, walks up to tape recorder			
3	0'15" (26'56")	C/U [Close-Up] TAPE RECORDER Giles depresses "play" button on tape recorder; <i>Danse macabre</i> starts		<i>Danse macabre</i> starts Introduction (bars 25-32): <i>scordatura</i> solo violin, unaccompanied 	
4	0'16" (26'57")	W/S LECTURE THEATRE (from front at side) Xander, Anya, Buffy, and Willow are sitting in the Lecture Theatre, waiting for Giles's presentation to start			
5	0'19" (27'00")	M/S GILES Giles flexes (and cracks) his fingers, and puts the first slide on the projector (in reverse)	WHO ARE THE GENTLEMEN? [in reverse]	Cut from bar 32(2) to bar 84(3) for Theme A (bars 85-92): full first violin, accompanied by full strings, lower woodwind, trumpet, trombone, and percussion 	Slide in place on downbeat of bar 85 for start of the main theme (Theme A) Visual humor: Giles has displayed the slide in reverse but, blissfully unaware of his error, his demeanor is self-assured...
6	0'24" (27'05")	M/S XANDER Xander is speechless (figuratively speaking), mouth open			...Xander is at a loss for action...
7	0'25" (27'06")	M/S BUFFY AND WILLOW Buffy and Willow point to the slide to alert Giles to his error			...but Buffy and Willow draw attention to Giles's mistake...
8	0'26" (27'07")	M/S ANYA Anya (munching, with a bag of popcorn on her lap) motions a circle in the air with her finger, indicating that the slide is to be turned over			...and Anya signals how it can be rectified

(continued)

Appendix 2.1. (continued)

Shot no.	Time	Camera Shot/Description of Action	Projector Slide	Diegetic Music (with excerpts)	Commentary
9	0:27" (27:08")	C/U GILES Giles looks behind him at the slide			
10	0:28" (27:09")	M/S GILES Giles flips the slide over and puts his hands in his pockets, before removing the slide	WHO ARE THE GENTLEMEN? [correct way round]	Repeat of Theme A (bars 93-100): solo violin and upper woodwind, accompanied by bassoon, harp, full brass, and percussion 	Slide in place on downbeat of bar 93 (start of repeat of Theme A)
11	0:34" (27:15")	M/S BUFFY AND WILLOW Buffy and Willow trade looks			
12	0:36" (27:17")	C/U GILES Giles puts on a new slide and nods his head repeatedly	THEY ARE FAIRY TALE MONSTERS [Includes picture of one of the Gentlemen on left-hand side of slide]	Theme B (bars 101-16): full strings, accompanied by double bass, woodwind (not flutes), horns, and timpani 	Slide in place slightly before start of Theme B (bar 101)
13	0:37" (27:18")	M/S GILES Giles is nodding his head, hands on hips; he then changes slides and points his finger in the air	WHAT DO THEY WANT		Slide in place toward midpoint of Theme B (bar 109), which commences with the same material as bars 101f
14	0:45" (27:26")	M/S WILLOW Willow puts up her hand, and points repeatedly to her chest			
15	0:48" (27:29")	C/U XANDER Xander mouths "Boobies?" and makes an accompanying gesture with his hands (spread in front of his chest to suggest breasts)			Visual humor: Xander misinterprets Willow's gesture (note that breasts are a uniquely female signifier)
16	0:50" (27:31")	C/U GILES Giles, unimpressed at Xander's error, removes the slide		Theme C (bars 117-24): antecedent phrase in solo violin accompanied by pizzicato upper strings, lower woodwind, horns, and harp; consequent phrase in upper woodwind and xylophone, accompanied by pizzicato full strings, brass (not horns), and timpani 	Removal of slide occurs at downbeat of bar 117 (end of Theme B/start of Theme C) Theme C is derived from the main theme (Theme A), on the dominant
17	0:51" (27:32")	M/S BUFFY AND WILLOW Buffy and Willow appear similarly unimpressed; Willow rolls her eyes and points at the new slide, giving Xander a look			





Shot no.	Time	Camera Shot/Description of Action	Projector Slide	Diegetic Music (with excerpts)	Commentary
18	0:54" (27:35")	M/S GILES Giles gestures with his arm to the slide he has put up	HEARTS [Includes picture of three heart shapes]	[Consequent phrase; see above for orchestration] 	Cut to shot (new slide) coincides with consequent phrase of Theme C (bar 121)
19	0:56" (27:37")	M/S XANDER Xander visibly realizes his mistake		Theme C (bars 125-32); as before	
20	0:59" (27:40")	M/S ANYA Anya, reaching into her popcorn bag, does not appear to care much for the proceedings (she seems to be enjoying herself)			
21	1:00" (27:41")	M/S GILES Giles changes slides and nods	THEY COME TO A TOWN [Includes picture of two Gentlemen on a hill overlooking two houses] THEY STEAL ALL THE VOICES SO NO ONE CAN SCREAM [Includes picture of two Gentlemen on a hill (in continuation of the previous slide) and four victims below, with lines extending from the mouths of the victims to the Gentlemen]	Return to material of introduction (bars 133-6): solo violin, joined by xylophone, accompanied by held chord (trumpets, oboes) 	Slide placed in time for consequent phrase of Theme C (bars 129-32) Slide placed on bar 134; note the use of this musical material (from the introduction) as a "framing" device heralding a new section of explanation
22	1:07" (27:48")	M/S BUFFY AND WILLOW Buffy and Willow are taking all this information in			
23	1:09" (27:50")	M/S GILES Giles puts on a new slide, and points in the air to articulate the word "then" (on the slide)	THEN [Includes another picture of one of the Gentlemen on left-hand side of slide]	Cut from bar 137(1) to bar 337 (after five beats' rest) for transitional passage (bars 337-44): full strings <i>arzo</i> , accompanied by sustained horns and timpani roll 	Giles's rhetorical slide (and demonstrative pointing action) is further articulated by the transitional nature of the music: that it is building to a climax signals the crux of his explanation
24	1:10" (27:51")	C/U GILES Giles is pointing in the air; he then removes slide from projector			The quick cut to this shot further articulates the narrative importance of the word "then" on the slide
25	1:13" (27:54")	M/S GILES Giles puts a new slide on the projector	[The slide shows a picture of one of the Gentlemen, having wielded a knife, having made an incision in the chest of his victim, who is lying on a bed]		Slide placed during transitional passage (three bars before start of climax): prepares for the next slide



(continued)



Appendix 2.1.1. (continued)

Shot no.	Time	Camera Shot/Description of Action	Projector Slide	Diegetic Music (with excerpts)	Commentary
26	1'17" (27'58")	C/U SLIDE (as projected onto screen) Giles moves a new slide onto the projector such that it appears on the screen	[The slide shows a picture of one of the Gentlemen pulling out the heart from his victim (in continuation of the previous slide)]	Bar 344 conflated with bar 369 (rising scale in upper woodwind) to effect cut to bar 370 for apotheosis of Theme B (bars 370-85): trombones, accompanied by full strings (using opening motif of Theme A) and full woodwind, horns, and percussion	Slide placed fractionally after music enters its apotheosis; the climactic nature of the music underlines the horror of the graphic visual images (note that this is also the first close-up shot of a slide, and is even more gruesome in its imagery than the last)
27	1'19" (28'00")	C/U BUFFY Buffy, finding the imagery unpleasant (perhaps because of the graphic nature of Giles's slide pictures), looks at Willow			
28	1'21" (28'02")	C/U WILLOW Willow looks back at Buffy (in agreement?)			
29	1'22" (28'03")	M/S ANYA Anya, still eating popcorn, appears indifferent to the horror depicted on the slides			Visual humor: unlike Buffy and Willow, Anya is oblivious to horror (cf. shot 20); being an ex-vengeance demon, she has seen it all before
30	1'24" (28'05")	M/S XANDER Xander starts to write on his message pad	THEY NEED SEVEN THEY HAVE AT LEAST TWO		Slide placed prior to bridge section, reached in the ensuing shot.
31	1'26" (28'07")	M/S GILES Giles changes slide	[Includes picture of seven heart shapes, colored in red (dripping blood?)]		[In fact, the Gentlemen have three hearts already, as revealed by the scene in the clock tower at the start of Act 3.]
32	1'29" (28'10")	M/S XANDER Xander clicks his fingers in the air to attract everybody's attention		Bridge section (bars 386-415): full strings (variously accompanied) alternating with full orchestra	Music calms a little, preparing for the final climax – thus allowing more "discussion"
33	1'30" (28'11")	M/S BUFFY AND WILLOW Both girls look in Xander's direction			
34	1'31" (28'12")	C/U XANDER Xander holds up his message – "How do we kill them?!" – and looks inquisitive			
35	1'34" (28'15")	M/S BUFFY Buffy makes a thrusting, up-and-down motion with her hand in front of her (endeavoring to mime the action of staking)		[Full violins]	Buffy's gesture is coincident with bar 394 (the start of a new passage led by the violins, which extends as far as the Animato section – and thus encompasses the entire sequence of the misinterpretation of Buffy's mime and its resolution)




Shot no.	Time	Camera Shot/Description of Action	Projector Slide	Diegetic Music (with excerpts)	Commentary
36	1:36" (28:17")	C/U XANDER Xander looks at Buffy strangely			Visual humor of shots 35-43: Buffy's attempted mime is misunderstood by all as a gesture connoting male masturbation
37	1:37" (28:18")	M/S BUFFY Buffy wonders why Xander has reacted in this way, and looks at Willow			
38	1:38" (28:19")	M/S WILLOW Willow appears slightly appalled (she avoids eye contact with Buffy)			
39	1:40" (28:21")	C/U GILES Giles (no doubt equally shocked) looks deadpan			
40	1:41" (28:22")	M/S BUFFY Buffy reaches for a stake in her bag, and attempts to mime the action of staking again with the help of a visual aid			
41	1:45" (28:26")	C/U XANDER Xander visibly understands Buffy now			
42	1:46" (28:27")	C/U GILES Giles also understands (and has an answer prepared)			
43	1:49" (28:30")	M/S BUFFY AND WILLOW Willow gives Buffy a reassuring look and smiles; she too has understood			
44	1:52" (28:33")	M/S GILES Giles has, off-screen, already put up a new slide Giles changes slide at the end of this shot	IN THE TALES NO SWORD CAN KILL THEM [Includes picture of one of the Gentlemen, with three swords penetrating him]	Animato section (bars 416-37): full orchestra 	Cut to this shot occurs fractionally after the start of the Animato section, as the music enters its final climax
45	1:56" (28:37")	C/U SLIDE (projected) Giles's slide comes into view on the projector screen	BUT THE PRINCESS SCREAMED ONCE... AND THEY ALL DIED [Includes picture of a princess with lines coming out of her mouth, and two Gentlemen lying dead on the ground]		Cut to this shot coincides with bar 421 (a near-repeat of the material of the previous five bars) Sound is revealed to be the means of neutralizing the very demons that caused the silence
46	1:58" (28:39")	M/S WILLOW Willow suddenly has an idea, and scrabbles around for a visual aid to help her communicate it		[Full strings, accompanied by full orchestra] 	Willow's visible reaction to her flash of inspiration occurs at bar 426 (the concluding cadences of the Animato section)


(continued)



Appendix 2.1. (continued)

Shot no.	Time	Camera Shot/Description of Action	Projector Slide	Diegetic Music (with excerpts)	Commentary
47	2'00" (28'41")	M/S BUFFY AND WILLOW While Buffy is writing on her message pad, Willow proceeds to mime: she holds up a CD, and covers her ears as though the sound is too much for her (indicating that they can use recorded voices to fight the Gentlemen)		[As above] 	Climactic codetta of music (bars 430-7) is coincident with Willow's mime (shots 47-9)
48	2'04" (28'45")	C/U GILES Giles looks a little bemused			
49	2'05" (28'46")	M/S WILLOW Willow continues her mime of her ears being covered, then places her hands around her throat and sticks her tongue out to suggest death. She then smiles as if happy (with the demise of the Gentlemen? with her own acting skills?)			
50	2'07" (28'48")	M/S GILES Giles, understanding the message Willow is trying to communicate, quickly changes slide, and points to his throat (again, he has an answer prepared)	ONLY A REAL HUMAN VOICE [Includes picture of one of the Gentlemen standing next to a gramophone (with lines coming out of the gramophone to indicate sound)]	Coda, Tempo 1 ^o (bars 438-end): oboe subsequently solo violin; accompanied by sustained horns alternating with <i>tranzolo</i> strings 	Last section of music corresponds to the cockerel crowing (i.e. daybreak) in Henri Cazalis's poem Slide in place for the first solo (oboe, bar 440) of the coda
51	2'12" (28'53")	M/S BUFFY AND WILLOW Willow looks disappointed that her idea will not work Buffy (who is still writing on her message pad) raises her hand, finger extended, to attract attention			
52	2'18" (28'59")	C/U BUFFY Buffy holds up her message pad, which reads: "How do I get my voice back??"			
53	2'20" (29'01")	M/S GILES Giles opens his arms wide (to indicate that he does not know) and removes the slide			
54	2'23" (29'04")	M/S BUFFY Buffy, disappointed with Giles's answer, lowers her message pad			
55	2'25" (29'06")	M/S GILES Giles puts on a new slide	BUFFY WILL PATROL TONIGHT [Includes picture of a girl (apparently Buffy) armed with bow and arrow]		



Shot no.	Time	Camera Shot/Description of Action	Projector Slide	Diegetic Music (with excerpts)	Commentary
56	2:27" (29:08")	M/S BUFFY AND WILLOW Buffy gestures that Giles's drawing portrays her as too fat		[Solo violin, accompanied by sustained horns] 	Visual humor: Buffy exhibits vanity over the representation of her figure (a traditionally female concern) Buffy's reaction to the slide depicting her coincides with the start of the solo violin theme (bar 455), thereby identifying her with the protagonist of <i>Danse macabre</i>
57	2:30" (29:11")	M/S GILES Giles motions that it is not important, and points at Buffy, and then the slide (as if to reinforce his instruction) After that, he picks up a thick bound volume from the desk, points at Xander, Anya, and Willow, and then holds up the book (signaling that everybody else is to research tonight)			
58	2:37" (29:18")	W/S LECTURE THEATRE (from front at side) Xander, Anya, Buffy, and Willow rise from their seats and begin to walk away following Giles's presentation Buffy, at the front of the shot, picks up one of Giles's slides			<i>Danse macabre</i> merges seamlessly into the show's score following bar 467, with the progressive introduction of violin <i>tremolo</i>
59	2:46" (29:27")	C/U BUFFY (through slide) The camera shot blurs Buffy and focuses on the slide (which depicts a drawing of one of the Gentlemen)			<i>Seize</i> into the next section of Christophe Beck's score for "Hush"
Scene ends	2:49" (29:30")				



Notes

1. Julie Brown, "Ally McBeal's Postmodern Soundtrack," *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 126, no. 2 (2001): 275–303; Robynn J. Stilwell, "The Sound Is 'Out There': Score, Sound Design and Exoticism in *The X-Files*," in *Analyzing Popular Music*, ed. Allan F. Moore (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 60–79; K. J. Donnelly, "Music on Television 1: Music for Television Drama" and "Music on Television 2: Pop Music's Colonisation of Television," in *The Spectre of Sound: Music in Film and Television* (London: British Film Institute, 2005), 110–33 and 134–49 respectively.

2. Lionel Salter, Humphrey Burton, Jennifer Barnes, and David Burnand, "Television," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed., 29 vols, ed. Stanley Sadie and John Tyrrell, vol. 25 (London: Macmillan, 2001), 232–43. Throughout this essay, the term "score" has been used in preference to "underscore," which would seem to provide an inadequate indication of the prominence of much of the non-diegetic music of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel*.

3. Anahid Kassabian discusses this emergent phenomenon in *The Soundtracks of Our Lives: Ubiquitous Musics and Distributed Subjectivities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, forthcoming).

4. Brown, "Ally McBeal's Postmodern Soundtrack," 285.

5. On the fallacy of such critical approaches, see Simon Frith, "Why Do Songs Have Words?" in *Music for Pleasure: Essays in the Sociology of Pop* (Cambridge: Polity, 1988), 105–28.

6. Carolyn Abbate, *Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991), 29, 19; italics in original.

7. On the connections with Wagnerian aesthetics drawn historically in the theory and practice of film music, see for example Scott D. Paulin, "Richard Wagner and the Fantasy of Cinematic Unity: The Idea of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* in the History and Theory of Film Music," in *Music and Cinema*, ed. James Buhler, Caryl Flinn, and David Neumeyer (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 2000), 58–84. For a good discussion of Williams's revival of the classical film score, see Kathryn Kalinak, "John Williams and 'The Empire' Strike Back," in *Settling the Score: Music and the Classical Hollywood Film* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 184–202.

8. Stilwell, "The Sound Is 'Out There,'" 61.

9. On this point, see Neil Lerner, "Nostalgia, Masculinist Discourse, and Authoritarianism in John Williams' scores for *Star Wars* and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*," in *Off the Planet: Music, Sound, and Science Fiction Cinema*, ed. Philip Hayward (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 97.

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10. More in-depth discussions of the relationship between film and television are yielded by, for instance, John Ellis, "Cinema and Broadcast TV Together," in *Visible Fictions: Cinema, Television, Video*, rev. ed. (London: Routledge, 1992), 224–50, and Kristin Thompson, "The Dispersal of Narrative: Adaptations, Sequels, Serials, Spin-offs, and Sagas," in *Storytelling in Film and Television* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 74–105.

11. John Hill and Martin McLoone, eds., *Big Picture, Small Screen: The Relations between Film and Television* (Luton: University of Luton Press, [1996]).

12. The twelve-episode first season of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, which commenced broadcast over halfway through the programming year as a midseason replacement for *Savannah* (1996–1997), is an exception in this respect.

13. On this point, see Donnelly, "Music for Television Drama," 124.

14. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* has revealed itself to be particularly aware of its serialized nature; notably, the hundredth episode, "The Gift" (B5.22), opened with a sequence of clips garnered from many of its previous shows.

15. See Sarah Kozloff, "Narrative Theory and Television," in *Channels of Discourse, Reassembled: Television and Contemporary Criticism*, 2nd ed., ed. Robert C. Allen (London: Routledge, 1992), 92.

16. Of the substantial corpus of writings on television, I have found the following texts particularly helpful in this regard: John Fiske, *Television Culture* (London: Methuen, 1987); John Corner, *Critical Ideas in Television Studies* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1999); and Jeremy G. Butler, *Television: Critical Methods and Applications*, 3rd ed. (Mahwah, N.J.: Erlbaum, 2007).

17. Among the studies that have notably guided my thinking are Linda K. Hughes and Michael Lund, *The Victorian Serial* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1991); Carol A. Martin, *George Eliot's Serial Fiction* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1994); and Jennifer Hayward, *Consuming Pleasures: Active Audiences and Serial Fictions from Dickens to Soap Opera* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1997). J. Don Vann's introduction (1–17) to *Victorian Novels in Serial* (New York: Modern Language Association, 1985) is similarly insightful.

18. Robert Giddings and Keith Selby, *The Classic Serial on Television and Radio* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001); see further, Robert Giddings, Keith Selby, and Chris Wensley, *Screening the Novel: The Theory and Practice of Literary Dramatization* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990).

19. For example, Hughes and Lund, *The Victorian Serial*, 276–77, and Butler, *Television*, 40.

20. Rhonda Wilcox, *Why Buffy Matters: The Art of Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2005), 2–3. Jennifer Hayward's study of serialization, *Consuming Pleasures*—which successively considers Dickens's literature, comic

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strips, and soap operas—is also particularly germane given that both *Buffy* and *Angel* continued as comics following their television runs.

21. While various traditions have previously emerged of including intermissions in cinema screenings, the practice has now largely been consigned to history.

22. Hayward, *Consuming Pleasures*, 3, 4.

23. Roy M. Prendergast, “Music for Television: A Brief Overview,” in *Film Music: A Neglected Art: A Critical Study of Music in Films*, 2nd ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1992), 275.

24. Matthew Mills, “Ubi Caritas? Music as Narrative Agent in *Angel*,” in *Reading Angel: The TV Spin-off with a Soul*, ed. Stacey Abbott (London: I. B. Tauris, 2005), 33–37.

25. That is, discounting as anomalous an isolated (and truncated) presentation some years later at the end of “Power Play” (A5.21).

26. All timings provided in this chapter have been taken from the PAL-format DVDs available in the U.K.; timings for NTSC-format DVDs may differ.

27. Theodor W. Adorno and Hanns Eisler, *Composing for the Films* (London: Athlone, 1994), 4–6; James Buhler, “*Star Wars*, Music, and Myth,” in *Music and Cinema*, ed. Buhler, Flinn, and Neumeier, 33–57.

28. See further, Robynn J. Stilwell, “‘I Just Put a Drone under Him . . .’: Collage and Subversion in the Score of ‘Die Hard,’” *Music and Letters* 78, no. 4 (November 1997): 551–80, in which Stilwell explored the central role played by the music of *Die Hard* (1988) in questioning which of the film’s ostensible hero (John McClane) and villain (Hans Gruber) was the true antagonist.

29. Claudia Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (London: British Film Institute, 1987).

30. Jeff Smith, *The Sounds of Commerce: Marketing Popular Film Music* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998). For a more explicit reevaluation of the standpoint exemplified by Gorbman and others, see Jeff Smith, “Unheard Melodies? A Critique of Psychoanalytic Theories of Film Music,” in *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies*, ed. David Bordwell and Noël Carroll (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 230–47.

31. That such musical cues can accumulate meaning with each progressive occurrence implicitly casts doubt on the legitimacy of assigning them names (for example, the “Buffy and Riley” theme) that, taken at face value, suggest otherwise. Having continually questioned my assumptions in the course of my research, however, my opinion is that the labeling used in this study—much of which is not my own—is nonetheless defensible.

32. Donnelly, “Music for Television Drama,” 119–24.

33. Further discussion on this point is to be found in Justin London, “Leitmotifs and Musical Reference in the Classical Film Score,” in *Music and Cinema*, ed.

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Buhler, Flinn, and Neumeyer, 85–96. Matthew Mills, in his article in the present volume, subjects this and other terminology commonly encountered in studies of musical multimedia to more rigorous scrutiny.

34. Brown, “*Ally McBeal*’s Postmodern Soundtrack.”

35. Christophe Beck, “Close Your Eyes,” Track 18, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer: The Album* (TVT, 1999); idem, “Sacrifice,” Track 22, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer: Once More, With Feeling* (Rounder, 2001); idem, “I’m Game,” Track 20, *Angel: Live Fast, Die Never* (Rounder, 2005). Also included on these releases were Beck’s Suites from “Restless” and “Hush” (Tracks 20 and 21 respectively of “*Once More, With Feeling*,” the latter incorporating the “Buffy and Riley” theme) and the musical cue from *Angel* in which Doyle’s theme is heard most prominently (Robert J. Kral, “Hero,” Track 6, *Live Fast, Die Never*).

36. Nancy Holder with Jeff Mariotte and Maryelizabeth Hart, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer: The Watcher’s Guide*, vol. 2 (New York: Pocket Books, 2000), 434–35.

37. Doubtless some viewers will have been aware of the crossover in advance and others will have noticed the mention of David Boreanaz as Angel in the opening credits, or surmised from the “previously on . . .” sequence that he would return in the course of the episode; but that takes nothing away from the significance of the presentation of Angel’s “I’m Game” theme in the score prior to his appearance onscreen. Likewise, it is the non-diegetic music that informs the audience that Oz’s departure from Sunnydale is preying on Willow’s mind as she escapes the dorm party in “Doomed” (B4.11) and that Buffy is in Riley’s thoughts while on a nighttime stroll in “Goodbye Iowa” (B4.14), as well as confirming that the telephone call that Buffy and Willow receive in “Passion” (B2.17) concerns the news of Jenny’s death.

38. Such intertextual practices extend back to the mature origins of leit-motivic procedures, given the musical reference to Wagner’s *Tristan und Isolde* (1857–1859) found in his *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* (1862–1867). One contemporary television example is yielded by the crossover of the character of Dr. Martha Jones (plus her associated musical theme) from the revived *Doctor Who* to spin-off series *Torchwood* (2006–).

39. “Hush.” *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Season 4). Dir. Joss Whedon. DVD. Twentieth Century Fox, 1999.

40. The musical excerpts supplied in the appendix have been prepared from Camille Saint-Saëns, *Danse Macabre and Havanaise for Violin and Orchestra in Full Score* (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover, 2005).

41. Michel Chion, *Kubrick’s Cinema Odyssey*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (London: British Film Institute, 2001), 90–97.

42. The full rhyme is as follows: “Can’t even shout, Can’t even cry, The Gentlemen are coming by. Looking in windows, Knocking on doors, They need

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to take seven and they might take yours. Can't call to Mom, Can't say a word, You're gonna die screaming but you won't be heard."

43. Linda Phyllis Austern, "'Forreine Conceites and Wandring Devises': The Exotic, the Erotic, and the Feminine," in *The Exotic in Western Music*, ed. Jonathan Bellman (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998), 26–42.

44. As a cue characterized by the use of wordless voices, it naturally suggests analogy with Doyle's theme from *Angel's* "Hero" (A1.9), which had aired two weeks earlier.

45. All skeletal transcriptions in this chapter (including those in Table 2.1) have been made by the author and are drawn from the episodes "Hush" and "Doomed," *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Season Four, Twentieth Century Fox Television, 1999–2000, with score by Christophe Beck.

46. Of course, connections between witchcraft and sexuality have long been embedded within Western culture; see for example Lyndal Roper, *Oedipus and the Devil: Witchcraft, Sexuality and Religion in Early Modern Europe* (London: Routledge, 1994).

47. Abbate, *Unsung Voices*, 29.

48. Interview with Christophe Beck in Holder, Mariotte, and Hart, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer: The Watcher's Guide*, vol. 2, 434.

49. Consider for example how John Williams's instantly recognizable themes to blockbuster film franchises such as *Jaws*, *Jurassic Park*, and *Harry Potter* were carried over to later sequels even after Williams himself had stepped down as principal composer of their scores.

50. In the case of many channels, this period of time would have been extended by the commercial breaks, which can in no sense be considered part of the artwork itself. While subsequent releases (for instance in DVD format) present the multimedia text uninterrupted, as I shall presently discuss, we should also not overlook the practices of many viewers of skipping through these intermissions in watching domestic recordings of the initial television broadcast.

51. Hughes and Lund, *The Victorian Serial*.

52. "Once More, With Feeling." *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Season 6). Dir. Joss Whedon. DVD. Twentieth Century Fox, 2001.

53. "Spin the Bottle." *Angel* (Season 4). Dir. Joss Whedon. DVD. Twentieth Century Fox, 2002.

54. Mills, "Music as Narrative Agent in *Angel*," 38.

55. More rarely, DVD releases may reinstate the intended order of a season aired out of sequence owing to unforeseen circumstances, as was the case with *Buffy the Vampire Slayer's* "Earshot" (B3.18), the broadcast of which was postponed until just prior to the start of season four.

56. The tradition of including “bonus material” such as documentary featurettes, deleted scenes, and episode commentaries by directors, writers, and actors also enhances the viewer’s understanding of the narrative in ways not available during the show’s initial broadcast run. Conversely, multimedia materials that are ancillary to the series itself (and more specific to its broadcast on television), such as trailers, may be omitted.

57. Matthew Mills, “Meaning and Myth: Leitmotivic Procedures in the Musical Underscore to *Angel*, Season One” (unpubl. MS, 2002).

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CHAPTER THREE

SPIKE ENSOULED

The Sonic Transformations of a Champion

Elizabeth A. Clendinning



From the moment that Spike crashed into the “Welcome to Sunnydale” sign accompanied by the wailing of electric guitars at the beginning of the second season of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*¹ (“School Hard,” B2.3), it was apparent that a new kind of vampire was in town. Although the Buffyverse was still young, several stereotypical varieties of vampires had already been presented: the garden-variety vamps that Buffy staked on a daily basis; the continuously plotting older vampires, such as the Master and his minions; and Angel, the vampire with the soul, who at the time of Spike’s arrival was still too shy and penitent to take more than a small part in the doings of either humans or vampires. Enter Spike, the bleach-blond British vampire, and the entire dynamic changed.

Spike became a permanent character in *Buffy* only during the fourth season, but he played an integral role in the show from his first appearance, serving throughout the series as a cynical, self-interested antihero who grudgingly does “the right thing,” albeit including many mistakes and misjudgments along the way. His personal journey is often compared with that of Angel, the only other vampire to help Buffy and her friends, and ultimately the only other vampire in the Buffyverse to possess a soul. However, Spike’s characterization throughout the series varies considerably from Angel’s. Unlike Angel or his alter-ego Angelus, who seeks to destroy the world, both the “evil” and “good” Spikes have very human tastes and preferences and would like to prolong enjoyment of them as



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much as possible; as he says in “Becoming, Part 2” (B2.22): “The truth is I like this world. You’ve got dog racing. Manchester United. And you’ve got people. Billions of people walking around like Happy Meals with legs. It’s all right here.”² More importantly, both with and without a soul, Spike embodies the very human trait of devotion to others, especially in relation to the women in his life. Spike’s unconscious obsession with living and human behavior, signified by these traits, and his negotiation between vampire and human motivations guide his overall journey away from being the “big bad” and in the end are what allow him to become, in the idiom of the Buffyverse, a champion.

Music is one of the primary ways through which Spike’s humanization and character is developed. One method of characterization is the music references found among the popular-culture references in Spike’s conversations with others, which establish Spike’s humanity by connecting him to the changing human world. Music is also used to typify Spike’s relationships with his lovers—primarily Drusilla in the second season and Buffy in the sixth season. Finally, in *Buffy*’s seventh and final season, Spike’s battle to gain control over his past mistakes and present circumstances is explored both diegetically as he struggles against a sonic mental trigger created by The First Evil, and non-diegetically through the music that accompanies his madness and eventual regain of self-control, thus enabling him to save the world.

“I Did It My Way”

Buffy the Vampire Slayer as a whole is full of references to popular culture; however, it is relatively rare for them to be spouted by a vampire, at least until a few seasons into *Angel*. We find out over the course of the series that Spike has a passion for the television show *Passions* (“Something Blue,” B4.9), as well as for making references to a variety of movies, from *Mary Poppins* (“Tabula Rasa,” B6.8) to *Star Wars* (“School Hard,” B2.3). However, the most prominent and frequent references that Spike makes to popular culture are to music, which helps to establish his rebellious image as well as place him within a temporal context that would be familiar and welcoming to the audience.

During the first full scene in which he appears in the episode “School Hard,” Spike’s first substantive lines in the series make reference to Wood-

stock. One vampire brags that when he kills Buffy, “It’ll be the greatest event since the Crucifixion. And I should know, I was there.” Spike responds:

You were there? (chuckles) Oh, please! If every vampire who said he was at the Crucifixion was actually there, it would have been like Woodstock . . . I was actually at Woodstock. That was a weird gig. I fed off a flow-erperson, and I spent the next six hours watchin’ my hand move.³

By comparing Woodstock to the Crucifixion, Spike astutely (if irreverently) demonstrates that he keeps up with events current to the decades in which he has lived, which gives him the appearance of interacting with and, to some extent, appreciating humanity. The added reference to drugs in this particular line is one of many allusions to his “bad boy” character, which is developed throughout the series both visually and aurally. It also gives Spike credence as a fan of human musicality, assuming that he was at Woodstock not just for the feasting, but for the entertainment as well.

Further allusions to Spike and popular music establish another human characteristic: having specific musical taste. As is perhaps to be expected in light of Spike’s dress and flippant behavior, his genre of choice is punk. He drunkenly sings along to the Gary Oldman version of “My Way,” meant to imitate Sid Vicious of the Sex Pistols in the episode “Lover’s Walk,” (B3.8), and hums along to “I Wanna Be Sedated” by the Ramones while waiting with Buffy at a stakeout (“Crush,” B5.14). This shows Spike to be culturally literate—something that is not often true with vampires, especially those along the lines of Drusilla, the Master, or even Angel, whose musical tastes seem to have topped out both time-wise and in terms of taste with Barry Manilow. Vampires are characteristically beings kept out of time by the fact that they do not age or die; these cultural references place Spike squarely in our time. Furthermore, the fact that Spike can be said to have specific musical tastes makes his characterization like that of a human, someone with whom the audience can identify, even if he is evil and immortal. In yet another reference—in which Buffy assures a bouncer that Billy Idol stole his look from Spike, not the other way around (“Sleeper,” B7.8)—Spike is mistaken for a human, and not only that, a popular music idol: the epitome of a certain era.

Perhaps the most interesting of these brief popular music references occurs in the episode “Two to Go” (B6.21). Spike is preparing to face the

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first of the challenges required of him to retrieve his soul—a fight to the death with a character he refers to as “the walking action figure.” Spike flexes his muscles and simply says, “Here we are now. Entertain us.”—a reference to the hugely popular Nirvana song “Smells Like Teen Spirit” from the 1991 album *Nevermind*.⁴ Aside from expanding Spike’s range of cultural references beyond the 1970s, this cocky remark reflects the conflicting emotions that Spike has in facing off with this opponent—fear, determination, and a dismissive attitude toward the event’s importance.

All of these popular music references, sprinkled throughout the seasons of the television show, serve to reinforce Spike’s human type of nature and make the character accessible to the audience. Further, they establish him by his musical choices as a rebel and a “bad boy,” someone who sees himself as dangerous and in control. Interestingly, this is in strong opposition to one of the other main ways that music is used to characterize Spike: as a “man” dominated by his relationships with the women in his life.

Spike and Drusilla

Drusilla: “I’m naming all the stars.”

Spike: “You can’t see the stars, love. That’s the ceiling. Also, it’s day.”

Drusilla: “I can see them. But I’ve named them all the same thing, and there’s terrible confusion. . . .”⁵

From the beginning of the series it was apparent that Spike, more than most other vampires in the series, was obsessed with his relationships to others around him, especially the women in his life. In Spike’s first full introductory scene in the episode “School Hard” (B2.3), he walks into the Anointed One’s lair and dominates the room by his joking derision of the other vampires. Striding around, smiling in “vamp face,” Spike comments, “You’ve got slayer problems. That’s a bad piece of luck. Do you know what I find works real good with slayers? Killing them. . . . Yeah, I did a couple slayers in my time. I don’t like to brag. Who am I kidding? I *love* to brag!”⁶ Spike’s mood is jocular, and his derisive and offhand comments place him above the serious mood of the other vampires. At this point, he is clearly the dominant vampire in the room. However, the atmosphere

soon changes when Drusilla, thin and frail looking, wanders into the room. Spike quickly slips into his human appearance again and, looking worried, tells Drusilla that she should be resting, as she is still weak. At this point, the underscoring—a barely audible tremolo in the strings—changes to gently sweeping strings occasionally punctuated by a high, tinkling theme in triple time that is reminiscent of a music box. As the two vampires interact, several things become apparent: first, that Drusilla is entirely mad. Her movements are childlike, her speech hazy and illogical, and her actions unpredictable. It is also clear that Spike is completely enamored of her. He puts his jacket around her when she says she is cold, and reassuringly agrees with her when she changes topics in the middle of a conversation and proclaims, “I’m a princess.” All the while, the tinkling music box theme serves to intensify this strange display of madness and complete adoration. In addition to madness, the music box also encodes femininity—music boxes as instruments are often associated with childhood and the woman’s sphere of the home, both by their traditional use and the quiet, gentle sounds that they make. The fact that Drusilla is characterized with the music box ascribes to her a delicate femininity just as much as visual cues in the scene, such as her long, white, frilly dress. The contrast with Spike (who was previously characterized by hard rock, a traditionally masculine music) further heightens this characterization, making it even more notable that Spike—the powerful male—is under the influence of Drusilla.

In fact, Spike is sonically dominated by this feminine theme throughout the second season. Another example of this occurs in the episode “Lie to Me” (B2.7), when he and Drusilla are discussing her meeting with Angel in the park. Although most of their discussion is accompanied by low, slow-moving strings, a hint of the high, tinkling music box theme begins when Spike expresses his concern about Drusilla’s going outside. Again, the theme is correlated with madness—Drusilla has been asking a dead bird why it will not sing. Although Spike proves himself to be the evil vampire-in-charge at other points of this episode, at this juncture he is completely under the influence of Drusilla.

Although Spike may be a big, tough vampire, he is putty in Drusilla’s hands, willing to do anything—even team up with the slayer—to try to protect her. Ultimately, however, Drusilla leaves him for a Chaos Demon, claiming that Spike has “gone soft” and is too devoted to Buffy. Spike,

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broken by this revelation, returns to Sunnydale in the episode “*Lover’s Walk*” (B3.8), full of self-pity. He has been truly dominated by this frail, crazed vampire, and now that she’s gone, he does not know what to do with himself—until he finds Buffy.

Spike and Buffy

Spike: “Come on. I can feel it, slayer. You know you want to dance.”⁷

Spike’s obsession with Buffy begins when he first meets her at The Bronze in “*School Hard*.” The camera follows Spike as he gazes upon the slayer and her friends, and crescendos in non-diegetic string tremolos interrupt the diegetic music of the indie rock group playing onstage as the camera cuts back to focus on Spike, the predator. Eventually the band in the club is drowned out by Spike’s accompaniment, and accents in brass instruments are added to the score. Spike lures Buffy outside, where she fights and kills one of Spike’s minions. It seems for the moment that he is in control—he has lured Buffy from her normal haunts and calmly announces, to a menacing, descending line of half-steps in the violin and bass strings, that he is going to kill her on Saturday. His confidence is underpinned by the music in the fight scene at the school in the latter half of the episode—but just when it appears he has cornered Buffy, and a tremolo in the high strings precipitates his killing blow, Buffy’s mother hits him over the head with an ax. Spike crumples to the floor, and the tremolo disintegrates into a descending whine, finally coming to rest on a low note with a crash, symbolizing Spike’s defeat by the Summers women. Spike returns throughout the next few episodes, his apparent dominance of Buffy growing, even to the point of his managing to capture Angel in “*What’s My Line, Part 2*” (B2.10). Spike’s dominance, however, comes crashing to a halt—literally: Buffy brings a church organ crashing down on him, putting him in a wheelchair for most of the rest of the season and signaling the beginning of her dominance over him.

Throughout the second season, Spike and Buffy’s interactions are primarily antagonistic, and their meetings are usually accompanied by silence or the crashing strings motives and wailing French horns of non-diegetic “fight music.” The fight music is not particularly notable; most of Buffy’s fight scenes are underscored in this fashion. The silence,

however, is notable and probably not incidental. Generally, only the “good” characters have conversations with Buffy that are not accompanied by musical motives (generally dominated by violins) that are, if not representative outright of evil, at least suggest certain instability to these interactions. Although it does not seem that Spike is already being characterized as “good,” this silence may imply some kind of equality and stability in power between the two, since any underscoring is usually used to indicate some type of powerful or passionate exchange, such as impending violence or romance.

A major shift in Spike’s characterization takes place at the end of this season. Buffy must try to stop Angelus from destroying the world. Although Spike is supposedly in league with Angelus as a member of his vampire “family,” instead of aiding Angelus in his quest, Spike comes to Buffy for assistance in defeating him. (“Becoming, Part 1,” B2.21 and “Becoming, Part 2,” B2.22) His motivation is not particularly noble; instead, he only wants to win back Drusilla, who has left Spike as a lover in favor of Angelus. As the two enemies strike a bargain and Spike aids Buffy in the fight against Angelus, Spike joins Buffy in being accompanied by the sympathetic non-diegetic fight music, which signifies a change from Spike’s usual characterization as a villain. Ultimately, however, he leaves Buffy to die and swaggers off with an unconscious Drusilla, accompanied by an eerie half-step theme in the bass, leaving town as an ambiguous character.

Spike’s exit at the end of the second season was initially supposed to be the end of his tenure as a character in the Buffyverse; however, due to his popularity as a character, Joss Whedon decided to bring him back.⁸ Spike makes only one appearance in season three of *Buffy*, in the episode “Lover’s Walk” (B3.8), and the question of his role as a good or an evil character continues to develop. His return to town mirrors his first entrance, as he drives into town to the wailing sounds of a raging guitar and knocks over the “Welcome to Sunnydale” sign. However, it is soon clear that everything has changed. Drusilla has left him, and he is broken—drunk and miserable. In this episode, he captures Willow to try to force her to perform a love spell for him to get Drusilla back; however, he spends most of the time crying on her shoulder and reminiscing about good times with Dru. This scene is accompanied by significant changes in the music underscoring his scenes with Willow—when he is violent

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toward Willow, the underlying music is reminiscent of the agitated string themes characteristic of *Buffy* fight scenes, yet they calm almost immediately and become a melancholy solo violin theme as he begins mourning his loss of Drusilla. Although Spike ultimately leaves town at the end of the episode, determined to win Drusilla back by the force and brutal spirit she used to love, something has clearly changed. Spike does not know it yet, but his place is with Buffy and her friends—a fact that becomes clear as he comes to live and fight both with and alongside them in the next few seasons of the show.

The change in the non-diegetic music that accompanies Spike as he transforms from occasional ally to a more frequent friend of the Scoobies during the fourth and fifth seasons are subtle—shifts mostly in perception as he begins to fight consistently at Buffy’s side, not against her, both by his own choice and due to the pacifying chip placed into his head by the Initiative. One thing, however, that is not subtle is the growing sexual tension between the vampire and the slayer, which first comes to light in the episode “Fool for Love” (B5.7), in which Buffy seeks to learn from Spike how he killed previous slayers. In this episode, their relationship (and Spike’s past interactions with slayers) are summed up as a kind of dance.

Spike: She was cunning, resourceful . . . oh, did I mention? Hot. I could have danced all night with that one.

Buffy: You think we’re dancing?

Spike: That’s all we’ve ever done.

Spike (voiceover): And the thing about the dance is, you never get to stop.

Spike: Come on. I can feel it, slayer. You know you want to dance.

Buffy: Say it’s true. Say I do want to.

Buffy: It wouldn’t be you, Spike. It would never be you.

Buffy: You’re beneath me.⁹

While not strictly a musical reference, this scene exposes the careful choreography of Spike and Buffy’s relationships. The “dance,” while not something particularly musical, involves both a physical act—her slaying

duties, especially their on-and-off sparring, which is violent and verging on sexual—and words, represented in their verbal jousting as Spike declares his interest in her and Buffy responds negatively to his overtures. In this case, the dancing reference is appropriate—at this point, Buffy is the lead in this dance, having complete control over Spike’s emotions. Spike does not seem to mind being led around by Buffy; however, as he presciently notes, “The thing about the dance is, you never get to stop”—foreshadowing both his evolving relationship with Buffy as she must negotiate her slayer duties and her growing feelings for Spike.

Spike and Buffy’s interactions in “Fool for Love” (B5.7) highlight a new type of interaction between Buffy and Spike—by now, Spike has begun to more consciously realize his love for the slayer, and although Buffy still treats Spike as a necessary evil, Spike is right in asserting that there is “something” beginning to grow between them. Throughout the fifth season, Spike (somewhat awkwardly) constantly volunteers to assist and fight beside Buffy, and shares her heroic fight music—if only until she pushes him away. Victoria Spah explores their growing relationship as a type of courtly love in her essay “‘Ain’t Love Grand?’ Spike and Courtly Love.”¹⁰ Spah situates Spike within the traditional conception of medieval courtly love, defining it as the desperate love of a knight for a lady who is unattainable, usually due to social or marital status. Spike follows this pattern—he is obsessed with the slayer, a woman unobtainable both by her human nature and her role as the slayer. Spike’s spurned pursuit is evident in the music accompanying his twisted courtship of Buffy. For example, in “Crush” (B5.14), in which Spike declares his love to Buffy and offers to kill Drusilla for her, the accompanying music consists of gently sweeping violin and woodwind lines in a higher register, suggestive of Spike’s uncertain yet positive affections for Buffy. Her response (“The only chance you had with me was when I was unconscious”) brings his music crashing down in the manner of text-painting with a low brass blare that eventually fades into silence, while Spike begins to rant about all the “bloody women” in his life. However, like the object of courtly love, Buffy does respond to Spike’s misguided overtures from afar. When he lets himself be tortured to protect Dawn in “Intervention” (B5.18), Buffy rewards him with a single kiss, accompanied by music similar to that which accompanied Spike’s overtures in “Crush.” It is but a small reward, and it is clear that Spike has not at all attained Buffy; nonetheless, the spark is

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there—a spark that is developed into more complex feelings through the beginning of season six.

Spike’s Musical Role in “Once More, With Feeling”

Spike, to Buffy: “You have to go on living . . . so one of us is living.”¹¹

The place where these complex feelings come to the fore is in “Once More, With Feeling” (B6.7), perhaps the episode most evocative of all the characters’ emotional states in general (and their development through music). One central part of the episode is the change in the relationship between Buffy and Spike.

At this point in the series, Spike has begun voluntarily working with all of Buffy’s friends but still isolates himself from them by living in his crypt. He begins to investigate the cause of the mysterious singing and dancing before Buffy even comes to him for help, but his true involvement begins when she comes to him, and he begins to sing against his will. In sum, Spike takes part in four songs in this episode—each of which reveals how his feelings for the slayer have developed over the last few seasons of the show, how his general desires and attitudes toward life, death, and undeath have changed correspondingly, and “where he will go from here.”

While none of Buffy’s songs are specifically about Spike, all of what he sings in this episode is related to her. The first song, “Rest in Peace,” is Spike’s solo number—a rock ballad that begins slowly and builds to striking, heavy guitar chords at each repetition of the chorus.

The most notable aspect of this song is the life-versus-death imagery that Spike associates with Buffy. He loves her because she can “make him feel” like he is not dead—a strange thing for a soulless vampire to proclaim, and even stranger for a vampire to want. However, he says that she sees him as the opposite: he is inappropriate for her as a lover because he is “evil,” and therefore being involved with him sexually would be to “misbehave.” Spike also alludes to the confidences she has shared with him throughout the sixth season with the words “A whisper in a dead man’s ear / it doesn’t make it real.” Since he is dead and she feels dead inside after being brought back from heaven, he has been her only real confidant—but what she shares with him is that which she would rather forget, as she would rather ignore Spike.

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It seems too that finally, after over a season of following Buffy around, Spike is at a breaking point: she should either take his offer of love or leave him alone; in essence, either make him feel alive or let him die. He is obviously frustrated with the situation—both being in a liminal space of Buffy’s affections, and existing in a place between life and death. The fact that he “can’t find [his] sweet release” can be seen as referring to both his sexual and emotional desires for Buffy, and his frustration at being caught between life and death—which is also related to Buffy; if he were alive, they could be together, and if he were dead, he would not be tortured by their interactions.

The dance sequence that accompanies this song is also noteworthy, as it enhances the verbal play of the song. At the beginning, Spike is singing softly to Buffy in his crypt, and she constantly rolls her eyes at him. The scene then cuts to a funeral at night in the graveyard, and Spike begins to fight all of the mourners. At the end, Buffy tries to push him away, and as he is holding on to her wrists, they both fall into an open grave, landing with her lying on top of him. Physically, this number indicates that, contrary to Spike’s lyrics, Buffy really is trying to get away from him, but he keeps pulling her back toward him while blaming her for his feelings. At the end of the song, as she stalks away, he says, “So, you’re not staying then?” This song demonstrates an ambivalence in both Buffy and Spike’s views on their relationship—while Spike is clearly in love with Buffy, he is tired of her games; on the other hand, although Buffy claims to be thoroughly not interested in Spike, she listens to him attentively throughout the majority of the song. This ambivalence on both of their parts will play out through the rest of the episode, as well as continuing into the rest of the season.

Spike also participates in the full-cast piece, “Walk through the Fire.” After an angry discussion with the Scoobies, Buffy heads out alone to save Dawn. Although “Walk through the Fire” is an ensemble song, Buffy is the primary focus of the song, both of the others’ lines and her own. The opening of the song gives a succinct explication of her feelings at this point:

I touch the fire and it freezes me.
I look into it and it’s black.
Why can’t I feel?
My skin should crack and peel.
I want the fire back.¹²

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We can see from this that, unlike Spike, Buffy at this point feels that nothing makes her life worth living. We have known this from the beginning of the episode—some of her first lines in the opening number were “I just want to be alive.” She is heading out alone, nonetheless, because she must “save the day” again. Spike is the first to join her. He is alone, smoking a cigarette, when he sings aloud:

I hope she fries!
I'm free if that bitch dies.
I'd better help her out.¹³

Spike reiterates the ambivalence toward Buffy that he expressed in “Rest in Peace.” He sees that he could be free of the hold that she has over him and for a moment entertains the thought that he might be free—and then he decides to help her, no matter how much it may hurt him. As the song progresses and Spike heads toward The Bronze, he continues to debate with himself about Buffy:

First he'll kill her then I'll save her. . .
No! I'll save her, then I'll kill her.¹⁴

However, unlike some of the other characters who take part in this song, Spike never doubts Buffy's abilities—his only internal debate is what his actions should be in this case, not regarding right or wrong, but how his decision will affect his relationship with Buffy. This dominating love and confidence in Buffy is portrayed as somewhat selfish vis-à-vis the noble-minded words of the others—in the end, Spike arrives at The Bronze alone, and his only real concern is for Buffy—but it is his love that will eventually save her.

When Spike does arrive at The Bronze, Buffy has already ended her verbal jousting with Sweet and once again has burst into a song—“Something to Sing About,” in which she reveals to everyone that “I think I was in heaven,” and that she now feels empty after this experience. The music supports her emotions, dropping unexpectedly and modulating on “heaven,” as though her sadness itself has depressed the song's tonal center. She begs her friends and Sweet to “Please, give me something to sing about”—that is, something to give her life meaning. She dances as she sings: at first slowly, then faster and more acrobatically, incorporat-

ing moves she uses when she fights. She finally begins to spin, faster and faster, smoke curling off of her. Everyone looks on, horrified, knowing that she is going to burst into flames and die like Sweet's earlier victims. Suddenly, Spike stops her, grabbing her by her upper arms and turning her to face him. Slowly and deliberately, using Buffy's musical motif from "Something to Sing About," Spike sings:

Life's not a song
 Life isn't bliss
 Life is just this
 It's living . . .

You have to go on living
 So one of us is living.

Spike is contradicting some of the feelings he expressed in "Rest in Peace"—after all, it is implied that Buffy is the only thing that makes his undead state feel like life; should she not also need a reason to "sing," a reason to live, particularly for both of them? In her essay in this volume, "Concealing Truths: Rhetorical Questions in 'Once More, With Feeling,'" Cynthia Masson suggests that instead of seeking life at this point, it is rather that Buffy, having found heaven following her last demise, seeks to find life *through* death; if life is the dance that never ends, she may see death as her own "sweet release."¹⁵ That Spike stops her is remarkable; he surely knows the pain of not being able to die, the pain of having the ability to live (and die) snatched away by someone he trusted, and has grappled to find meaning in an existence that no longer feels like life. However, he knows that "the thing about the dance is, you never get to stop"—that seeking death, even as a release at this point, will not end her suffering. His actions, then, can be seen as extremely selfish and yet still self-sacrificing, reflecting his ambivalent attitudes toward the slayer as expressed in "Walk through the Fire." Spike, fearing that he may never have Buffy in the way that he wants, continues to exist and help her, regardless of the passion or lack thereof that this may entail. He gives this advice to Buffy selfishly—he wants her to live, so that at least the one he loves can be truly alive and not caught in an indeterminate state of existence as he is—but he gives himself honestly, unperturbed by what she has revealed, and in the end is the only one who could save her from letting herself die.

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The last song of the episode, “Where Do We Go from Here?” reflects on the changes in the characters’ relationships that have occurred during this episode. Spike, fed up with what he terms “the big group sing,” stalks out; to his surprise, Buffy follows. They begin to sing together, cadencing on the word “feel,” and then kiss passionately, ending the episode. For the first time, Buffy and Spike really are singing together—and they are interdependent, both trying to find a way to feel alive by being with the other, who is in some respect considered to be “dead.” From Spike’s perspective, this woman, Buffy, is what links him to being alive, to being as human as he can be. Their relationship over the course of the sixth season will be what aids his growth as an individual, toward becoming more human and eventually seeking his soul.

“Where Do We Go from Here?”: After “Once More, With Feeling”

Spike: “I’m in love with you.”

Buffy: “You’re in love with pain. Admit it, you like me because you enjoy getting beat down, so really, who’s screwed up?”¹⁶

After their kiss in “Once More, With Feeling,” Spike is constantly trying to persuade Buffy to talk about what has taken place between them. During one of their fights, Spike discovers that his chip no longer works against Buffy and declares that she’s no longer as human as she thinks she is. In “Smashed” (B6.9), this comes to a head when Spike starts a fight with Buffy in an alleyway, taunting her about her new, vulnerable status. As they continue their fight in a decrepit abandoned building, they are accompanied by the customary Buffyverse fight music—shrieking eighth-notes in the violins and brass—as they throw each other into the walls and exchange spiteful words. Suddenly Buffy kisses him violently, and the strings change to sweeping lyrical lines reminiscent of the end of “Once More, With Feeling” as they continue to kiss. Buffy throws him into the wall and, as she dives after him, the walls audibly crack and the sound of Spike’s belt buckle hitting the floor can be heard as Buffy removes it and unzips his pants. They start to have violent sex, and the building begins to collapse around them. Despite Spike’s desire for Buffy and the fact that he initiated the fight, the music follows Buffy’s perspective as she is physi-

cally satisfied. The chord changes all correspond to her actions (throwing him against the wall, pulling him out of the way of a falling beam) rather than his, and notably, the untexted singing of a female voice enters as she lowers herself onto him and begins to ride him. Camera angles enhance this perspective; it is only Buffy's face that is shown in great detail. Finally, while we hear Buffy's moans throughout, Spike is silent, and the scene fades to the credits accompanied only by the sweeping strings, female vocals, and Buffy's moans.

As they continue their love/hate relationship throughout the season, Buffy initiates all their sexual encounters, which are accompanied by subtle orchestral gestures, indicating their mutual attraction and lust. However, whenever they are simply talking or Spike tries to talk to Buffy romantically, there is only silence. This reflects the still one-sided nature of their relationship, the fact that although Spike may have finally attained his beloved in some sense, it is still not a mutually directed relationship. Spah's description of their relationship through the lens of courtly love is especially appropriate here: although Spike has technically "attained" Buffy by the sixth season, he is "in love" while she is only "in lust"; therefore she is still in a sense the unattainable beloved. Her refusal to meet Spike's romantic overtures thus continues to reflect this ideal of courtly love, rather than a true relationship, and is represented by silence between them—the feeling is not mutual, and therefore they do not interact musically, in addition to not engaging verbally.

When Buffy ends her relationship with Spike, there is again only silence; this sonic dichotomy becomes most clear in the episode "Seeing Red," (B6.19) when Spike tries to rape Buffy. This differs greatly from their previous sexual encounters. Even though their sexual relationship was mostly controlled by Buffy and often included acts of violence on both parts, the sex was consensual, and rising strings generally highlighted their mutual passion. While Spike and Buffy are simply talking during this scene, the silence is not unusual, representing only the one-sided engagement of the two characters—after all, when Spike says "We have to talk," Buffy responds, "I really don't."¹⁷ Once again, Buffy can be seen as the "lady," keeping her pursuing lover at a distance. However, when Spike becomes violent, the silence is shocking. Violent encounters in the Buffyverse are almost always heavily scored, usually to reflect the power and movements of the character dominant in the scene. Here, Buffy is no longer in control; weakened by

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her earlier fight, she is easily held on the floor by Spike. Spike, on the other hand, has lost control in a different way—in madness and desperation, he threatens the one that he loves, and is horrified when Buffy finally kicks him to the wall and he realizes what he has done. It is only here that any musical underscoring begins again, when both characters regain a small portion of their usual power and control over themselves.

Realizing that he has hurt Buffy, Spike leaves Sunnydale at the end of the sixth season to regain his soul and become a man who is worthy of her love. Although he undertakes this journey in Buffy's name, it is one of the first times in the series that Spike acts independently of any of the strong females in his life; as he fights during the demon trials that will win him his soul, percussion crashes correspond with his blows and his victory over his flame-fisted adversaries. No theme associated with Buffy is used; Spike's music is for once his alone. During the last scene of the sixth season, the viewer sees Spike lying bloody yet triumphant on the ground. There is little scoring at this point, as the music from the previous scene fades. Amid these uneasy chords, the demon restores Spike's soul with a whoosh. Over his screams, the score offers a final unresolved chord going into the credits and beckoning the viewer to the next season. The fact that it is Spike who gets the last screen appearance in this season, despite all the danger and drama of *Dark Willow*, foreshadows the importance that "ensouled" Spike will have during the next season and at the show's conclusion.

Spike Ensouled

Spike, to Buffy: "I have come to redefine the words 'pain and suffering' since I fell in love with you."¹⁸

When Spike returns to Sunnydale with his soul at the beginning of the seventh season of *Buffy*, Buffy discovers him living in the basement of Sunnydale High, half mad with guilt and mentally tortured by The First Evil. This season in general contains much more subtle underscoring than the others, and in this case, instead of Spike being overshadowed by Drusilla's music or singing only about Buffy, it is The First's music that dominates his sonic landscape: a strange, undulating whole-step theme in the bass instruments, primarily cellos, that comes to mean that Spike is hallucinating or otherwise under direct control of the First. Through his

ravings, Buffy realizes that Spike has endured torture to regain his soul for her, and Buffy takes him back to live with her in order to watch over him in this half-mad state.

One major element of The First's control over Spike is manifested in a type of mind control, using a folk song, "Early One Morning," as a "trigger" to release the evil Spike from his usual conscience-driven self. We first hear the tune of this song near the beginning of the episode "Sleeper" (B7.8), when Spike is humming to himself as he buries a dead girl. This looks quite suspicious, as the audience has just learned that there have been a streak of murders of young girls, and will later find out that a few newly made vampires claim Spike as their sire. Buffy instructs everyone to keep their eyes on Spike as he comes and goes, until they can figure out whether he has resumed killing. Buffy herself finds out something distressing as she watches Spike in a crowded section of town and he begins picking up young girls—a scene that is underscored by a street musician playing Spike's tune on a harmonica, which then dissolves into an uneasy theme in the strings as Buffy realizes that Spike has done nothing dangerous to this girl—not yet.

When Buffy confronts Spike about this streak of killings, he denies everything—yet he also admits that he cannot remember much of his recent evenings. However, he starts having flashbacks about the girls and goes to The Bronze to try to regain his past memories. There he meets and fights with a vampire he had just sired—to the accompaniment of Aimee Mann's song "Pavlov's Bell," a reference to the famous experiment in unconscious response. Spike realizes what he has done and that he is being controlled by The First, who appears to Spike as a second version of himself; however, he does not yet understand how this entity is controlling him.

Spike leads Buffy to the house where he thinks he has killed and buried all his victims. As they walk downstairs to the basement, The First's low, undulating theme is heard softly in the background. The alter-ego Spike appears to the real Spike and begins talking to him. Then, the alter-ego Spike begins to sing "Early One Morning," and we hear its words for the first time:

Early one morning, just as the sun was rising,
I heard a maid sing in the valley down below.
Oh don't deceive me. Oh never leave me.
How could you use a poor maiden so?¹⁹

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When the verse is over, the real Spike transforms into his vamp-face and begins to attack Buffy. The girls that he killed rise from the ground as vampires and join in the attack. When two of them have Buffy pinned, the alter-ego Spike encourages Spike to kill the slayer. However, when he begins to drink the blood from a cut on her shoulder, Spike remembers everything that has happened to him and backs away in horror. After Buffy quickly dispatches the rest of the vampires, Spike begs for Buffy to kill him quickly for what he has done. However, when he tells Buffy about the song and about seeing himself, Buffy does not kill him but instead offers to help him, as a way to learn how to defeat The First.

This episode is not the last in which Spike has to deal with The First attempting to control his mind—despite Buffy’s attempts to help, no one can seem to figure out how The First Evil has such strong control over him. In the episode “Lies My Parents Told Me” (B7.17), Giles attempts to use a magical stone to determine what is wrong with Spike—and causes him to fully remember “Early One Morning” and its original context. As the audience learns, Spike’s mother used to sing this song to him when he was young—and not so young; she still hums it to him as an adult when he is upset about his failed courtship of Cecily. As evidenced in this flashback, Spike was completely devoted to his mother, so much so that when she asked him about pursuing women, he said “I already have a woman in my life.”²⁰ Even after he has been turned into a vampire by Drusilla, he comes to change his mother as well to save her from tuberculosis. In this scene the song is being played in the background by a music box, evoking the delicate theme used to characterize Drusilla five seasons before and suggesting a link between the types of control that these “delicate” women had over Spike. He is eventually rejected by his mother when she is a vampire, and he stakes her because he cannot stand the cold, callous being she has become.

With this flashback, one finally understands that Spike had truly been dominated for his entire life by the women he loved, constantly seeking their approval. He cared about his mother enough to try to give her eternal life—and she rejected him for being a “limp, sentimental fool.”²¹ Cecily, his love interest as a human, also rejected him. Drusilla, his sire and companion for over a hundred years, rejected him for going soft and not being “vampire enough” for her. Buffy, in turn, rejected him for not being human enough. Spike has been driven by his desire to be accepted

by these women, to be seen as a strong lover and equal, but ultimately all have rejected him.

The song “Early One Morning” summarizes and ties together his interactions with these women well and helps explain how he could be so influenced by them. The song, a version of which is found in a manuscript in the Bodleian Library and in several books from nineteenth-century Britain, well represents his human years with his mother during this time period.²² The way that the song appears—performed, in a sense, by a non-corporeal evil being that is driving him mad—is reminiscent of Drusilla’s madness. Finally, this appearance is tied to Buffy in that The First is attempting to use this song to attack her through him. Moreover, the song text is appropriate to the situation: throughout his life, Spike was the one who was “left” and “deceived”; for all his tough talk and actions, he spent all of his years as a vampire and a human playing “the poor maiden,” abused by those he loved, even as he tried to make himself into a man that these women would admire and esteem.

Breaking this trigger, then, can be seen as not only Spike’s escape from the madness and control of The First Evil, but also as breaking free from the overwhelming female influences that had shaped his life. Further, the ability to break this trigger would allow him to stand on his own and be seen as a principled man—even if he was still a vampire. His opportunity finally occurred at what might well have been the end of Spike’s existence: his epic fight with Robin Wood. Even though Spike was at first under the control of the song’s sonic trigger when Robin turned on the speakers, he managed to regain his self-control, breaking The First’s hold over him, as well as his craving for approval from women.

Free from these external influences and armed with his new soul, Spike has come to control himself as a human and is able finally to be seen as a champion. In the third-to-last episode of the season, Angel comes back to Sunnydale, bearing an amulet that can close the door to Hell and keep The First Evil from rising to Earth—but only if it is borne by a superhuman champion endowed with a soul. Although Spike at first thinks he is not worthy of taking it, Buffy assures him that he is—and he takes it under his own free will. For the first time, Spike is considered to be an equal to the others, even perhaps a first among equals. In the series’ last episode, “Chosen” (B7.22), Spike bears the amulet to the Hellmouth itself, located under Sunnydale High. He joins in this last fight

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accompanied by a soaring unison triplet motive. As the amulet begins to glow and bursts into light, extending in rays from Spike's chest, the dramatic triplets are pushed to the background and a pacific theme shines through—Spike's own love theme with Buffy. He makes a last cocky rock history reference—"School's out for bloody summer," a play on the Alice Cooper song "School's Out"—bids Buffy goodbye, and bursts into flame, giving himself to save the world.²³

Conclusion: Spike as Champion

Over the course of *Buffy*, Spike underwent major personality transformations, got back his soul, and then was able to qualify as "a champion"—but what does it mean, precisely, to be a "champion"? In the Buffyverse, the word is actually used most often to describe Angel within the context of the show *Angel*, as a "champion of the powers that be," or, more importantly, as the ensouled vampire from the Shanshu Prophecy (first revealed in the Angel episode "Blind Date," A1.21) who plays a major role in the Apocalypse and is able to live and die again as a human. Although Spike as a character did eventually cross over to the show *Angel*, and the relationship between Spike, Angel, and the prophecy was explored in season five of *Angel* and its continuing comic series, it is uncertain whether the description of Spike as a "champion" within the context of *Buffy* already carries these precise implications.

So, then, what is a champion? It is clear that it has something to do with having a soul; that is, after all, one of Angel's stipulations for carrying the amulet. However, is it the soul itself that makes Spike a champion? As J. Renée Cox points out in the essay "Got Myself a Soul? The Puzzling Treatment of the Soul in *Buffy*," the soul is a difficult concept in the Buffyverse—there is never any explicit definition of a "soul," where it comes from, or its function. Cox suggests that it is often used to draw the equation "no soul = no morality," at least as perceived by those characters with souls; whether or not a soulless character does a "good" act, they are always perceived as inferior for lacking this built-in moral compass.²⁴ This explains why the Scooby gang distrusts Spike implicitly and Spike himself describes his soul as "The spark. The missing—the piece. The thing that would make me fit."²⁵

Cox suggests that perhaps, like with the Wizard of Oz and the Tin Man, the Scarecrow, and the Cowardly Lion, there is no soul to be be-

stowed—there is only the belief about the soul, and that makes all the difference.²⁶ He also, however, notes that Jane Espenson had said “As long as Spike hasn’t a soul, he cannot be redeemed”²⁷—implying that the *Buffy* creators, at least, saw the soul as a necessity for redemption.

However, although the soul may be necessary for redemption in the end, it seems that it is the *journey* toward the soul that really matters, the *change* that one will take on to become a better “person.” In her essay “Every Night I Save You: Buffy, Spike, Sex, and Redemption,” Rhonda Wilcox suggests that Spike’s sexual relationship with Buffy, the love it entails, and the change he goes through as a result are crucial to the characterization of Spike as “good”: “Spike owns no human soul, yet repeatedly *does* good; if he can be seen as capable of change, capable of good, capable of *love*, then he can represent an existentialist definition of good.”²⁸

Drawing from these perspectives, it seems that becoming a champion, then, not only requires having a soul, but realizing one’s worth as a “human” being, and being able to make the decision to grow, change, love, and even die, if necessary, to do “good.” Some combination of both Cox’s and Wilcox’s positions is reflected in Spike’s musical characterization. Spike’s musical tastes as embodied by popular-culture references both lend him an air of humanity with which viewers can identify as well as establish that he can change with the times—something most vampires are incapable of. The fact that the hold that women in his life have over him is expressed musically—in Drusilla’s music box theme, Spike’s songs to Buffy in “Once More, With Feeling,” the non-diegetic music accompanying Spike’s relationship with Buffy, and his mother’s song-trigger used by The First—also showcases his ability to love, even his incapability not to love. Most importantly, as Cox points out, Spike’s reaction to the terrible, silent rape scene—to go and retrieve his soul—shows his ability to change for the better because of love, and that even without a soul, Spike still had grown and changed enough from his earlier self to gain some sort of moral compass. Finally, whether it was caused by the physical return of his soul or merely the social and emotional empowerment that the return of the soul entailed, when he was needed the most, Spike finally had the courage and strength to accept and break away from his past enough to give himself as a sacrifice. It was thus both the soul and the personal growth and devotion that grew with it that allowed Spike to become a champion.

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Spike sacrificed himself out of love—not only because of Buffy, and not only to try to convince anyone that he was an equal. He was able to do this because he had completed the crucial part of his personal journey. Starting with his only link to humanity being an appreciation of popular culture and his humane devotion to his lovers, Spike went from being insecure and evil, if caring, to someone who was virtuous, if still not perfect. His musical characterization throughout the show *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* reflected and helped establish these changes, explicating his relationships with Drusilla, Buffy, and his mother and human past, while also showing him as humanlike through his time-grounded references to popular music. Spike continued to grow and change as he was brought back to life and made the transition to the series *Angel*, but the most profound aspects of his personal growth occurred in *Buffy*, where he was able to go from being just another evil vampire to a true champion.

Notes

1. Quotations from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* are cited by season and episode number.
2. “Becoming, Part 2.” *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Season 2). Dir. Joss Whedon. Twentieth Century Fox, 1998.
3. “School Hard.” *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Season 2). Dir. Joss Whedon. Twentieth Century Fox, 1998.
4. “Two to Go.” *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Season 6). Dir. Bill L. Norton. Twentieth Century Fox, 2002.
5. “Innocence.” *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Season 2). Dir. Joss Whedon. Twentieth Century Fox, 1998.
6. “Becoming, Part 2.” *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Season 2). Dir. Joss Whedon. Twentieth Century Fox, 1998.
7. “Fool for Love.” *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Season 5). Dir. Joss Whedon. Twentieth Century Fox, 2000.
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CHAPTER FOUR

MORE THAN JUST A ROCK 'N' ROLL REVERSAL

Tracking Gender on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*

Amanda Howell



U.S. television, popular music, and teen culture . . . what post-World War II prosperity brought together has yet to be torn asunder. Youth-oriented popular music is thoroughly worked into the fabric of contemporary television—bathing even the most unlikely subject matter in a wash of allusion, connecting the viewer to an array of cultural and historical associations, connotations of youthful rebellion and *fun*.¹ In television series that make systematic use of rock and pop on the soundtrack to address their youth and teen audience (a standard feature of youth and teen film since the 1950s but only becoming a part of youth-oriented television drama in the 1990s),² this work of extramusical allusion can be a complex affair. In no series is it more complex than in Joss Whedon's *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, a television text loaded with cinematic, televisual, and other pop-cultural allusions addressed to the media-savvy viewer. While this essay will, for the sake of simplicity, refer to “rock” as a catch-all for youth-oriented popular music of the post-World War II and contemporary period, *Buffy*'s soundtrack featured everything from classic/album rock, to punk, to dance music, to the live music of indie bands, to the series' original metal-inspired score played by California “nerd-core” punk band Nerf Herder. Likewise, the series incorporated, as part of its project of reflecting upon and revising screen representations of teen and youth culture, many elements of rock history as part of the shared culture of its characters and audience. Rock images and rock icons



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filtered through its characterizations; rock tropes and stories inflected its narratives. And in-jokes about rock aesthetics—what might be termed a *Rolling Stone*-inspired hierarchy of taste whereby the mere presence of a Celine Dion poster was sufficient to cue us to a college roommate's quite literal lack of soul ("Living Conditions," B4.2)—offered yet another site of identification for the series' fans. This discussion will not attempt an exhaustive survey of rock music and rock culture in the series, but rather will focus on how such images, icons, and stories contributed to gender representations in the series, both its running critique of hegemonic masculinity and its musical construction of Buffy herself as "transgressive woman warrior."³ Thus its analysis will consider not only music, but an array of musical cultural associations at work in the series, reflecting upon how such associations participated in the revisionist project of the series and how youth-oriented popular music worked as both audio and visual phenomena, its influence not only heard in the soundtrack but seen in *mise-en-scène*, affecting everything from hairstyle and fashion to acting styles to cinematography. This analysis thus acknowledges the degree to which youth-oriented popular music, in the post-MTV era, is a visual as well as aural commodity—and experience.

Rock 'n' Roll Animals, Rebel Males, and Eternally Juvenile Delinquents: Music, Hegemonic Masculinity, and Monstrosity in the Buffyverse

Giles (on werewolves): "It acts on pure instinct, no conscience, predatory and . . ."

Buffy: "In other words, typical male."

Xander: "On behalf of my gender—*hey*."

Giles: "Yes, let's not jump to any conclusions."

Buffy: "I didn't jump: I took a tiny step, and there the conclusions were."⁴

The werewolf sought by Buffy, Giles, and the gang in the season-two episode of "Phases" of course turns out to be Willow's new flame, Oz. Episodes focusing on the lycanthropically challenged but otherwise mild-mannered guitarist of Sunnydale band Dingoes Ate My Baby provided

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opportunities for the series to explore cultural connections between rock and a certain type of masculinity—also rock and sexuality more generally, when Oz met his female counterpart, Veruca, in season three. Veruca—indie rock siren and the werewolf who refuses to be caged—made it clear that the aggressive, dangerous, rock-identified sexuality explored in Oz’s story is not essentially male. It is, however, a culturally dominant trope of young masculinity, shaped and popularized by rock music and its screen cultures, from Elvis through *Don Kirshner’s Rock Concert* in the 1970s⁵ through endless MTV videos from the 1980s to the present. Thanks to *Buffy’s* commitment to revising the clichés of teens on screen, rock music’s screen masculinities are explored in both their attraction and their limitations, as rock’s gender conventions—like those of the horror, action, and teen films—are resurrected in order to be reworked by the series.

When Oz admits to Willow (and himself) that the wolf—dangerous, violent, sexually volatile and promiscuous—is “in me all the time,” he’s not the only character in the Buffyverse to struggle with an inner demon depicted as a rock ‘n’ roll animal. Because while rock music is initially associated with the daylight world of high-school-age youth—in “Welcome to the Hellmouth” highlighting the difference between Buffy’s nightmares of the Master and her first morning at Sunnydale High—and often subsequently used at the end of an episode to mark a return to what passes for normality at the school, it is also used to narrate the other side of Sunnydale. On the dark side of Sunnydale, the demons of teen and twenty-something life are more than metaphoric, as youthful fears, desires, passions, and flaws are embodied as literal monsters. And just as they are in places not on the doorstep of hell, music and music cultures are a part of this other side of the youth experience, its expression, and representation.

Thus, when Xander is possessed by the spirit of demonic hyenas, the radical personality transformation visited on the most tenderhearted and faithful (as well as perhaps the dorkiest) of the Scoobies is represented via an image makeover that owes more than a little to masculinities celebrated by rock’s screen representations (“The Pack,” B1.7). Reborn as a bully, would-be rapist, and enthusiastic carnivore, Xander manifests his inner hyena in part by acquiring the masculine appeal and the outsider cool that always eluded the fully human Xander. As he stalks across the high school campus, suavely groomed, with his “pack” to the accompaniment of the

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indie rock song by Far, “Job’s Eyes,” his new look is captured in slow motion; the lure of the newly confident and newly charismatic Xander is expressed in the familiar aural and visual terms of music video.

Visually spectacular masculinity of the sort employed in this episode is a familiar part of rock’s musical and screen culture but hasn’t gotten as much attention from film and television studies as have other masculine types. When feminist film scholars—most notably, Laura Mulvey—first started work on the structural role of sexual difference on screen, masculinity was largely identified in narrative terms: the male character’s ability to look and act authoritatively, thus to influence the direction of the narrative and likewise the direction of audience identification. It was female characters who appeared by contrast static, objectified, and spectacular. Several decades of feminist scholarship have complicated this schema, addressing its limited space for other types of male and female characters and revising its account of spectatorship and audiences. But compared with the numerous feminist studies of Hollywood and other film, little has been done to address specifically those male characterizations born when film, television, youth audiences, and rock culture were brought together in the post–World War II period. And yet, from the moment Elvis first shimmied on screen, the “to-be-looked-at-ness” (to borrow Mulvey’s awkward but useful term) of the classic Hollywood heroine was no longer an exclusively female characteristic.

The “to-be-looked-at-ness” of rock masculinity is embodied in the rock musical, youth cultural, and screen trope of the “rebel male.” Established in filmic representations like Marlon Brando’s *The Wild One* or Elvis’s *Jailhouse Rock*, the rebel male is the object of the audience’s gaze. In keeping with the heteronormative structure of Mulvey’s original scheme for classic Hollywood cinema, where men look and women are looked at, the audience imagined for this spectacular form of young masculinity is female, confirming that much of the rebel male’s power is sexual. Whereas in the classic Hollywood films that Mulvey takes as her examples only males somehow insufficient make spectacles of themselves, for the rebel male, making a spectacle of himself (on a motorbike, on the dance floor, onstage with a guitar) is a marker of cultural—and especially generational—difference from the mainstream. With a surly sex appeal that follows in the rutted tracks of Brando as *The Wild One* and the brooding silences that hint at existential dilemmas of James Dean in *Rebel without*

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a Cause, this particular brand of masculinity has sauntered, smoldered, brooded, and sneered its way through numerous incarnations of cool from Elvis to Ryan Atwood.⁶ Midcentury icons like Brando and Dean were not specifically associated with the rock soundtrack—the aural signifier of their outsider status on the film soundtrack was jazz—but their images were highly influential for on-screen masculinities in the decades to follow. Most notably, their effect can be seen in the image and acting style of Elvis Presley, who credited Brando and Dean as key influences on his signature style: “I don’t know anything about Hollywood, but I know you can’t be sexy if you smile. You can’t be a rebel if you grin.”⁷

Following Elvis’s prescription to the letter, Angel appears as the quintessential rebel male, and predictably, the bad boy centuries senior to Buffy steals her heart away. His outsider stance, silent affectlessness and melancholy, not to mention his style and wardrobe (his hair styled in a modified quiff,⁸ the velvet jacket we first see him in soon exchanged for leather) are all iconic of midcentury idols Dean, Brando, Presley, and their imitators. Thus, even before a passionate kiss reveals his “true face” as a vampire, our familiarity with the conventions of youth and rock cultural screen representations (as well as our familiarity with vampire lore that makes us cautious of pale, handsome men who only appear at night) clue us to his danger, as well as his appeal. He’s a night-stalking Moondoggie to Buffy’s Gidget (to recall yet another midcentury filmic influence on the series)—but without the happy ending.⁹

Angel may be the ultimate rebel figure depicted by the series—the baddest bad boy our heroine could fall for—but he’s not the only male character identified with this trope of screen masculinity. Each central male character has his rebel male incarnation in the Buffyverse—even Giles, when he reverts to his youthful tastes and violent tendencies as “bad-magic-ticking-time-bomb guy” in “Band Candy” (B3.6). Giles has his punk/rock roots photographically verified in “The Dark Age” (B2.8) by a doctored picture that conjures Buffy’s watcher as one of the baddest—and saddest—of rebel males, Sid Vicious. In each case—Xander, Oz, Giles—the transformation or reversion into the rebel male is viewed as a problem to be solved. Giving other characters the opportunity to hold this particular mode of sexually attractive but dangerous masculinity up to scrutiny, these transformations have the effect of deconstructing, of denaturalizing, the rebel male (who is invested in nothing if not the

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authenticity of his rebellion) over and over during the life of the series. Inevitably, even if such personality shifts might initially look like the work of chromosomes or hormones (as Giles assumes is the case when Xander acquires his demon-hyena makeover), they are revealed as the work of magic and demonic mayhem—thus not natural, not essential.

Perhaps most notable in terms of the series' denaturalizing and deauthenticating the rebel male is Spike, Angel's sometime vampire accomplice and rival, another eternally juvenile delinquent who tempts our heroine to stray to "the wrong side of the tracks."¹⁰ His bleached locks and black nail polish combined with the unisex uniform of jeans, Doc Martens, and leather references the gender-bending tendencies of the punk aesthetic. Spike is rock masculinity imagined by '70s Britain—complete with working-class London accent—rather than '50s America, as in the case of Angel (Spike is, after all, the younger of the two vampires). His entry into Sunnydale in the second season after the demise of the Master marks a generational shift in the vampire population of the series, a shift confirmed by his dedication to the youth cultural values of sex, drugs (alcohol, nicotine), and rock 'n' roll. As Elizabeth Clendenning mentions in her essay in this collection, when another vampire boasts of having been present at the Crucifixion, Spike counters with his own memory of a historical high point—feeding on a flower child at Woodstock and spending the rest of the event in a drug-induced daze "watching my hand move . . ." ("School Hard," B2.3). Unlike Angel, Spike won't be found reading Sartre by the light of his hearth ("Lovers Walk," B3.8): of his reading tastes we know little, but Spike's musical tastes—the Clash, the Sex Pistols, the Ramones—as well as his aesthetic preferences more generally confirm his authenticity as a punk-era reinvention of the rebel male. His humor tends toward the anarchic, and his impulsive dispatch of the vampire leader he dubs "the annoying one" confirms his antiauthoritarianism, even within the vampire realm.¹¹ Likewise, he has a fondness for all forms of popular culture from soaps to dog races to Buffalo wings and beer. He maintains the image of working-class rebellion and undead savagery, but is happy to feed off Sunnydale's comfortable middle-class lifestyle, just as his punk counterparts cannibalized middle-class music and fashion to create their own definitive style. Yet despite various demonstrations of his authenticity as a punk and a rebel, as the series reveals more about his history, both human and vampire, it makes clear that this "real man" isn't. His

history, as a mama's boy writing bad poetry on the edges of Victorian society, confirms the fragile humanity behind the mask of punk vampire macho, humanity and fragility that return with a vengeance when he gets re-souled at the end of season six in "Grave" (B6.22).

"If We Hear Any Inspirational Power Chords": Guitar Heroes, Power Chords, and Buffy's Theme

Buffy: "I'm just worried this whole session is going to turn into some training montage from an '80s movie."

Giles: "Well, if we hear any inspirational power chords, we'll just lie down until they go away."¹²

Looking at the history of the rock rebel, we see that, among the pleasures and priorities of popular music's screen representations from the 1950s to the present, the concerns of masculinity—especially white masculinity—rank high. The male coming-of-age story in its various guises has often been the narrative means for wedding youth music to youth culture on film, from star-maker narratives like *Jailhouse Rock* (1957), to the road movies that followed in the path of *Easy Rider* (1968), to teen films from *American Graffiti* (1973) to *American Pie* (1999) and its sequels. By comparison, screen representations that offer a place for female characters to engage with rock's ideology of individual freedom—as something other than adoring fans or decorative hangers-on—have lagged behind. In these terms, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is a significant entry in a comparatively short list. The series' methods of narrating the coming-of-age of Buffy and her circle includes not only engaging and reflecting critically upon screen representations of rock-identified masculinity—from rock stage performance to rock-infused film soundtracks—but also forging a new kind of rock-inflected identity for Buffy, based on gendered and generic revision of what are largely cinematic tropes.¹³

This transformation begins in the much-discussed opening of the first episode: having broken into the abandoned school at night, teen horror film's typical victim—the pretty girl who accedes to the advances of a bad boy—turns on her male companion as gleeful, fanged aggressor. The Nerf Herder theme that accompanies the credit sequence immediately following is a musical echo of this surprise reversal; its energetic score

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overwhelms the tentative opening notes of conventional horror film music and makes our first glimpse of Buffy (in an action-packed montage) into an audiovisual representation of triumph.

Just like Buffy's weekly victories on the battlefield that are more often than not accompanied by pratfalls, sight gags, and excruciating puns, the Nerf Herder theme is never deployed without a certain degree of self-conscious comedy, a sense of irony. In part this has to do with the band itself: Nerf Herder, though relatively unknown in 1997, like most of the indie bands that played on the series, had nevertheless by this time earned a reputation for slyly—or broadly—comic songs that send up conventions of mainstream pop and rock music. But even without insider knowledge of the band, astute viewers would find the musical origins of the theme and the irony of its deployment on Buffy's behalf difficult to miss. Its triumphal energy is derived from a tradition that includes late-1960s and 1970s "cock rock" (as filtered through Johnny Ramone) as well as the inspirational power chords of 1980s action cinema. Overtly gendered, the up-cycled guitar work reuses sounds of the past—the sound of spectacular masculinities of stadium concerts, rock documentaries, and Hollywood soundtracks—to make a new theme for the girl slayer. It's the sound of the rock rebel as "guitar hero"¹⁴ redone in energetic, if tongue-in-cheek DIY punk style.

The gendered and generic logic of the guitar hero is rendered comically explicit in the teaser of the first-season episode "Teacher's Pet" (B1.7) when Xander, hopelessly in love with Buffy, daydreams a scenario that allows him to play the hero for a change. The set is The Bronze; a fetchingly half-clad Buffy is in peril; Xander is the slayer who saves her . . . just in time to jump back on stage and finish his guitar solo, which concludes the fantasy. Xander wakes to find that Buffy has indeed been watching him, but not because he's wowing the crowd with his musical prowess. Humiliatingly, he was asleep and drooling in his science class. Comically consolidating the link between rock music and action, our brief look into the mind of teen everymale, Xander, is also used to poke fun at the conventions of macho rock performance/presentation: low-angle shots from the audience's POV show Xander, our hero, onstage with legs spread and guitar (what Steve Waksman has called a "technophallus") held aloft for admiring eyes.¹⁵ We see these conventions at work for real, if somewhat diluted, later in the same episode—only this time,

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the adoring audience for Superfine's lead guitarist (playing and singing a song entitled, appropriately enough, "I Already Met You") isn't a female fan, but Xander himself. It's a sly wink at the guitar hero as an idealized image of self, as well as a reminder of how, like the male pinup discussed by Richard Dyer or the muscular hero of action cinema, rock masculinity is a spectacle that both revels in and denies its own appeal—especially to other males. Instead, the guitar hero maintains himself as a display of patriarchal power via technological control, the "virtuosic transcendence" of guitar mastery.¹⁶ The comic use of the guitar hero is another example of the series' critically reappraising the sort of masculine ideal that is Xander's always unreachable goal. (Ultimately, of course, Xander will discover other forms of heroism, based on his faithfulness and good-heartedness, which save the day—and Buffy—on more than one occasion.)

Xander's fantasy-power-solo-combined-with-heroics recalls the moment in the 1980s when youth- and rock-oriented narratives left the bounds of the teen film and concert documentary. Aligned with a different set of visual associations in the MTV-inspired action film, power guitar was thus identified with yet another type of masculine triumph. Synergistic combinations of music and image, masculinity and technology updated the figure of the rock rebel. For instance, in the Jerry Bruckheimer production *Top Gun* (which retooled his previous success *Flashdance* by substituting planes for dancers and made full use of the new marketing opportunities afforded by MTV), the screams of jets are synched with the screams of guitars. Its success inspired a decade of action films that rocked their soundtracks. Even today, the power guitar can still be heard on action film scores: aural signifier of rock-identified masculinity imagined as the guitar hero, wedded to a new type of display, of bodies and weaponry.

The Nerf Herder theme locates Buffy-as-action-heroine in this trajectory of sound-image relations. If one is tempted to think that such theme music "masculinizes" her, it's worth recalling the one instance in which this theme is used outside of the credit sequence, in the concluding episode of the first season, "Prophecy Girl" (B1.12). In this episode Buffy goes to her final showdown with the Master somewhat incongruously attired in a diaphanous white prom gown and black leather jacket carrying a crossbow—visual representation of her mixed heritage as action hero and teen heroine. Once she is in the Master's lair and his thrall, however,

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the conventional signs of her heroism, crossbow and leather jacket, are stripped away. What's left is Buffy alone, the image of a typical victim of Hammer horror films: a frightened but beautiful young woman, with impressive cleavage, alluringly (and conveniently) upswept hair, lost in ancient, candlelit ruins.¹⁷ As the Master corrects her interpretation of the prophecy, explaining that she's not the hunter, but the hunted, and that by seeking him out she frees him, the extreme close-up on her face as she listens—tearful and pale, the eyes liquid-eyeliner-huge and horrified, the mouth trembling—is likewise pure Hammer-style gothic, with its characteristic focus on the tender, young, female victim. When he bites her, the visual treatment of the moment and its gasp of pain/pleasure, is again derived from Hammer's hyper-erotized image of vampiric violence. We then return to the present and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer's* trademark of comedy and horror; when the Master drops Buffy, face first, into a puddle, there's no decorative falling into a heap for Buffy—she goes over like a felled tree. A supremely disdainful gesture on the part of the Master, it says this body is finished! Toss it away.

Ah, but of course that body wasn't finished. On the contrary, when Xander revives her with CPR (so much more useful a skill than the guitar, as it turns out), he brings back not just her life, but her strength and spirit. Dressed only in the body of an objectified, eroticized-at-the-moment-of-death victim, she strides off to finish the bad guy to the sound of the Nerf Herder score. This music—clearly not just the series' theme, but hers—with its revisionist combination of horror and action soundtrack clichés, announces that even without a crossbow, she's a hero; even without the leather jacket, she's a rebel. A fitting moment to finish the final season, it is a metaphoric representation, in part through musical expression, allusion, and association, of the series' key objective: to empower the victim, and in doing so, to create a new type of hero and a new type of action spectacle.

“Don't Give Me Songs”: Buffy and Ballads, Expression, and Empowerment

Buffy was a new type of hero: not just because she occasionally wore a prom dress into battle, but because of the emotional depth she brought

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to her heroism, an emotional depth quite different from the inexpressive heroism of classic Hollywood war films and westerns, likewise different from the intense but narrow emotional range of the average action hero (who inevitably finds his life emotionally simplified—broken marriages repaired, families reunited, bosses and co-workers mollified—at the precise moment it becomes physically complicated, in a wish-fulfilling fantasy that says all you have to do is survive and you'll be happy). As Joss Whedon comments regarding Buffy's character and the series more generally, "emotional resonance" rather than monsters was always key.¹⁸ Music is about expression and feeling, and so it's a significant element in the representation of Buffy as hero.

Lawrence Grossberg has observed that, in relation to rock music and culture, femininity is in something of a double bind: on the one hand, rock music has created a space for and legitimized female desire, pleasure, sexuality, but on the other, this space has been circumscribed by romance, as the mainstream of songs represent women "defined by a relationship to a male partner, viewer, or listener."¹⁹ This lyrical constraint of women has found its screen complement in decades of rock musical representations preoccupied with male protagonists and their desires—for freedom, sexual expression, fun—where females appear only as objects of desire or blocks to freedom or expression. At first glance, it would seem that *Buffy* adheres to the mainstream of rock femininity and its focus on romance, as romantic ballads are particularly important to the musical characterization of Buffy. However, just as *Buffy*'s revisionist fantasy shifts the focus of teen, horror, and action genres to make them new for the girl slayer, so too is the role of love songs altered by their expressive and narrational role in the Buffyverse.

In the episode "Never Kill a Boy on the First Date" (B1.5) we see how more than just romantic concerns and desires are played out on the dance floor of The Bronze and how the epic, metaphoric language of a romantic ballad is given more literal significance. The trip-hop song "Strong" performed by Velvet Chain speaks of love, sacrifice, suffering, death. In the context of the impending apocalypse—from which Buffy is taking a break for her date with Owen—these words are given new meaning. Buffy's first dance with Owen—despite its brevity and many interruptions—acquires a degree of erotic impact, thanks in part to the sinuous accompaniment

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of guitar, turntable, keyboard, and percussion and in part due to Erika Amato's hypnotic voice as she sings:

Because you're so
So strong
You're so, so strong
You would fight for me
You would starve for me
You would die for me.
And I feel the same way too,
About you.²⁰

It's a complex performance on Amato's part and provides an equally complex musical commentary on Buffy and Owen's relationship. Lyrically, the song moves from praising the strength of the love object, to imagining its being whittled away by love, concluding with the singer's willingness to be similarly worn away or whittled down. Love equals pain plus loss being the equation that underlies most romantic ballads, the lyrics are in these terms not that unusual. What is striking, however, is the way that the lyrics are musically and vocally framed. Amato expresses vocally and in her stage performance the relish with which she anticipates both the strength and the sacrifice of her lover, with the words that conclude the chorus, "And I feel the same way too . . ." added almost as an afterthought. The overall impression is of a seductive but dangerous eroticism on the part of singer and song. As an accompaniment to Buffy's longed-for, despaired of, and ultimately less than satisfactory first date with Owen, it resonates with the complications (Buffy knows) will follow, despite her protestations that, for this evening at least, she's "just a girl." And, indeed, later that evening Buffy's role as a superhero will almost get Owen killed. Ultimately, she must give up the idea of having the handsome, intelligent, brooding, but all-too-vulnerable teen as a boyfriend. In these terms, "Strong" works as a siren song, less for Owen than for Buffy herself, who must ultimately choose her duty as protector over her desire for romance—and the boy who loves Emily Dickinson.

Likewise, as important as Buffy's romantic life always was to the series, and as closely linked as heroic concerns of apocalypse and death were to all-too-human concerns of romantic love and sex, Buffy's emotional life was never defined solely in this way. She may suffer for romantic love,

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but even at her moments of greatest suffering, romance never defines her life. When Willow resurrected the “warrior of the people” in season six, it was merely the latest—and most unsettling—example of the way in which Buffy’s heroism and her survival depended upon the love and devotion offered by her community of friends and family. Thus, the ballads used to narrate Buffy’s emotional journey, even if they are lyrically concerned with the romantic couple, inevitably comment on her place in a much wider social sphere than just the heterosexual romantic pair. An example of how the apparent affective priorities of a ballad can thus be expanded is the use to which Michelle Branch’s song and performance of “Goodbye to You” is put in the episode “Tabula Rasa” (B6.8). The song tells the story of a love affair at its end. When we see Branch at The Bronze, she is accompanying herself on acoustic guitar, huskily singing the verses, then using her rather piercing upper range to invest the chorus with greater emotional charge. The chorus—which functions conventionally enough as the climax of the song, signaled by change in key, volume, tone—is not about romantic pairing, but about the experience of being alone. In these terms it’s a moving but unremarkable song of romantic love and its loss. However, it’s used to tell the story of numerous losses and renunciations, all converging on Buffy at once.

In this episode Buffy, Spike, and the gang are all affected by a forgetting spell that Willow—by now obviously addicted to magic—has meant for Tara. When the spell Willow cast is broken, memories of arguments, antagonisms, and conflicts return with a vengeance, and the group as a whole is shattered, leaving Buffy alone in The Bronze, listening to Branch sing. The numerous losses her song narrates are depicted in a brief montage. Willow and Tara, who had together taken maternal and leadership roles after the deaths of Buffy’s mother and Buffy herself, break up. As the lovers part, Branch’s song plays in a sound-over; as Tara moves out of the Summers’s house, attempting and failing to say good-bye to Buffy’s sister Dawn, it plays on the radio. It’s not just a couple breaking up when Tara leaves Willow, but a family. At the same time Dawn loses the young woman who had cared for her like a mother, Buffy loses the man who cared for her like a father. In the same montage sequence we see Giles depart on his flight bound for England. With his departure, Buffy loses the last chance she has of ever again being looked after like a child by a loving adult, with the loneliness and responsibility that implies. Even more

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devastating than the loss of Giles is the loss of all the simple satisfaction in her role as hero that Willow's forgetting spell had temporarily returned to her. Buffy's emotional state is authenticated by Branch's impassioned performance and vice versa, even as visual images compete with sound as markers of thwarted desire, bitter experience. It is a moment that echoes and reinforces what we understand to be Buffy's loss of her sense of self since her resurrection, as she is cut adrift from—forced to bid farewell to—all the people and certainties that have anchored her in the past. Thus framed by Branch's song, the simplicity of which is belied by its narrative role across characters and scenarios, Spike and Buffy's kiss at the end of the episode can be accurately read as a gesture of desolation rather than romantic fulfillment.

“Give Me Something to Sing About”: Buffy's Revision of Rock's Screen Representations

As this brief survey indicates, music is crucial for the address of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* to its audience, a key element in its representation as well as an important youth-identified pleasure shared by its fans and characters. In part, its pleasures are the same ones that rock/punk/indie/trip-hop/pop music always offers, on television or the car radio: emotional and bodily expression, identification, escape from the constraints of the ordinary. Characteristic of the series' “almost obsessional reflexivity,”²¹ music and music-cultural references used on *Buffy* didn't just build a more authentic youth culture on screen, but also provided the means to reflect on that youth culture, its gendered and generic tendencies. In its development of characters like Angel, Spike, Xander, and Buffy, the series both challenged and ultimately revised music cultural stereotypes, as it interrogated the values associated with them, their particular assumptions and beliefs regarding music, masculinity, femininity, and youth. In the case of Angel and Spike, the limitations of the rock rebel / rebel male figure were linked to the frustrations of characters who appear to be what screen and rock fictions insist are “real men” but are not. By the end of the series, both Spike and Angel distance themselves from their rebel male images, as both struggle with their liminal existence as vampires-with-souls. By contrast, Xander, always hopelessly in competition with one or the other, is allowed to grow into maturity and leave his rock 'n' roll fantasies—if



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not his enthusiasm for music—behind. As for Buffy, her theme music clearly identifies her as hero and warrior. Janet K. Halfyard, drawing on the work of Philip Tagg regarding the use of gendered stereotypes in television music, has observed that the Nerf Herder theme is stereotypically masculine in its fast tempo, staccato phrasing, use of electric guitar, and percussion. Yet, as argued here, to discuss Buffy's characterization as simply a reversal of gendered convention is to miss the point. What we see at work in Buffy is a critical exploration and negotiation of music cultural possibilities, where challenging the representational limitations of genre and gender are narrated as the social, physical, and emotional struggle of the girl slayer—the transgressive woman warrior—to understand and take her place in the world of the series. And, as she—and the series—struggle, we see a significant expansion of the space reserved for women—and men—in music's screen representations.

Notes



1. Jeff Smith has noted that what makes the rock or pop compilation score different from the classic composed score is less its “range of narrational functions” than the fact that its “expressiveness derives . . . from the system of extramusical allusion and associations” it carries in “larger spheres of society and culture.” *Sounds of Commerce: Marketing Popular and Film Music* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 155.



2. Cinematic precursors to *Buffy* are important to this discussion, while television precursors play a lesser role. The reason for this has to do with the history of television, youth music, and the youth audience: narrative television programming directed entirely to a teen or youth audience, utilizing a pop or rock soundtrack, was, up until the 1980s, thin on the ground. While teen films from the 1950s onward featured popular music and musical performances, television limited its uses of rock and pop and other types of youth-identified popular music to series that featured live appearances—and lip-synched performances—of current hits, such as the long-running hit show Dick Clark's *American Bandstand* (1952–1983), joined in the 1970s by series like *Don Kirshner's Rock Concert* (1972–1983) and *Soul Train* (1971–2008); aside from these types of music shows, popular music groups and solo artists would appear as guests on variety programs, most notably *The Ed Sullivan Show* (1948–1972). U.S. television departed only briefly from this type of programming in the mid-1960s, when it wed (rather perfunctory) narrative to youth-identified popular music in the hit comedy series *The Monkees*



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(1966–1968), whose focus on the high jinks of a purpose-built rock band was inspired by the success of Beatles films such as *A Hard Day's Night*. While the growing use of various types of popular music in film scores inspired changes in television theme songs (such as the funk-based, blaxploitation-inspired themes of *Baretta* [1975–1978] and *CHiPs* [1977–1983] or the *American Graffiti*-inspired use of “Rock around the Clock” in the theme for *Happy Days* [1974–1984]), the first real change in televisual deployment of youth-identified popular music was in 1981, when MTV ushered in a new era of rock and pop music representation and consumption, based as much on the visual as on the aural. With the popularization of music television in the 1980s, youth-identified popular music's role in film shifted to incorporate what has become known as “the MTV aesthetic,” identified not merely with new uses of rock and pop music in non-diegetic scores, but also visual characteristics such as fast-paced editing and other cinematic departures from continuity style in framing and cinematography. MTV's influence soon began to appear not only in mainstream filmmaking but also in televisual aesthetics, first in television commercials and finally in television series. As television—especially television drama—has become increasingly cinematic over the past two decades, the rock and pop soundtrack has become an increasingly important part of its storytelling apparatus. *Buffy*—created by cinephile Joss Whedon to be as much like film and as little like conventional television as possible—is an excellent example of this move toward the cinematic, including its willingness to take full advantage of the expressive and allusionistic potential of music, including live performances and prerecorded rock and pop songs. For more on the history of popular music on the small screen, see John Mundy, *Popular Music on Screen: From Hollywood Musical to Music Video*. For more on the cinematic focus of *Buffy* and Joss Whedon's desire to critically rework teen film genres, see director's commentaries by Whedon for B1.1, B1.2, and B2.14.

3. Frances H. Early, “Staking Her Claim: *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* as Transgressive Woman Warrior,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 35.3 (2001): 11–27.

4. “Phases.” *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Season 2). Dir. Bruce Seth Green. Twentieth Century Fox, 1998.

5. Don Kirshner was an important figure in television and its participation in rock music culture. A successful music publisher in the 1960s, he was hired by the producers of *The Monkees* to provide hit-worthy songs for the show, and from 1973 to 1982 he hosted a syndicated weekly rock-concert program, the first to show live—rather than lip-synched—performances by rock groups. The program was a notable departure from the type of performances offered by shows like *American Bandstand* and *Shindig!* In its focus on live performance, it is considered by many to be an important predecessor to MTV.

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6. Ryan Atwood is the boy-from-the-other-side-of-the-tracks adopted by a wealthy family in the teen drama *The OC* (2003–2007) whose persona—from gesture to wardrobe—is indebted to James Dean.

7. Interview with celebrity columnist Lloyd Shearer, quoted in Peter Guralnick, *Last Train to Memphis* (London: Abacus, 1994), 324.

8. I'm told by a more fashion-forward source that Angel's hairstyle is, in fact, a French crop: the quiff reinvented for the early 1990s. In addition to its evocation of stars like Dean and Brando, the quiff has explicit cultural associations with popular music, owing to the number of musicians who've worn the style, from Elvis, to Morrissey (the Smiths), to Joe Strummer (the Clash), to Brian Setzer (the Stray Cats).

9. Moondoggie is, of course, the rebel male / surf bum played by teen idol James Darren in the 1959 movie *Gidget*. Appropriate to his status as a “clean teen” alternative to Elvis, Darren's character turns out to be less of a rebel and more of a boy next door in the film's conclusion. Always self-aware regarding its film and televisual influences, *Buffy* makes overt references to the pioneer teen film—one of the few of the pre-1980s period to focus on a female protagonist—and its plucky blond California heroine in two episodes, “Witch” (B1.3) and “Life Serial” (B6.5). For a more in-depth discussion of Buffy and her debt to and revision of Gidget's California girl persona, see Catherine Siemann, “Darkness Falls on the Endless Summer: Buffy as Gidget for the Fin de Siècle,” in *Fighting the Forces: What's at Stake in Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, ed. David Lavery and Rhonda V. Wilcox (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), 120–32.

10. Joss Whedon commentary on Buffy and Angel's romance, “Welcome to the Hellmouth” (B1.1).

11. “School Hard.” *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Season 2). Dir. John T. Kretchmer. Twentieth Century Fox, 1997.

12. “Once More, With Feeling.” *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Season 6). Dir. Joss Whedon. Twentieth Century Fox, 2001.

13. While *Buffy* in its writing clearly demonstrates Whedon's familiarity with the genre of sitcom, in its broader themes as well as its aesthetics—including its use of popular music on the soundtrack—it is largely indebted to various teen- and youth-oriented film genres. See note 2.

14. Steve Waksman offers an excellent analysis of the gendered logic of the “guitar hero” in his book *Instruments of Desire: the Electric Guitar and the Shaping of Musical Experience* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999). And, of course, the currency of the phrase has been confirmed by its use by the video game, *Guitar Hero*, which allows for audience identification with this figure to move past daydreams and air guitar.

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15. Steve Waksman, *Instruments of Desire: the Electric Guitar and the Shaping of Musical Experience* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 247.

16. Robert Walser, "Forging Masculinity: Heavy Metal Sounds and Images of Gender," in *Sounds and Vision: The Music Video Reader*, ed. Simon Frith, Andrew Goodwin, and Lawrence Grossberg (London: Routledge, 1993), 163.

17. Hammer Studios began its vampire series with a 1958 remake of *Dracula* starring Christopher Lee and Peter Cushing, the first *Dracula* film in color. Keen to exploit the possibilities of the story for its B film market, Hammer played up in this adaptation the eroticism of *Dracula* and his relation to his victims, with Lee reimagining the Count as a sort of nineteenth-century blood-sucking James Bond. Through the 1960s and 1970s Hammer continued to mine Bram Stoker's novel for new story ideas and likewise explored the lesbian themes suggested by Le Fanu's vampire story "Carmilla," with increasingly overt sexuality and partial nudity an important part of the films' appeal to audiences.

18. Whedon's commentary for "Innocence" (B2.14).

19. Lawrence Grossberg, "The Media Economy of Rock Culture: Cinema, Post-modernity and Authenticity," in *Sound and Vision: The Music Video Reader*, eds. Simon Frith, Andrew Goodwin, and Lawrence Grossberg (London: Routledge, 1993).

20. Velvet Chain, "Strong." *Buffy the Vampire Slayer: The Album*. Tvt, 1999.

21. Roz Kaveney, "'She Saved the World. A Lot.' An Introduction to the Themes and Structure of *Buffy* and *Angel*," in *Reading the Vampire Slayer: The New Updated and Unofficial Guide to Buffy and Angel*, ed. Roz Kaveney (London: I. B. Taurus, 2003), 11.

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- American Graffiti* (1973), George Lucas, Lucasfilm / Universal Pictures
- American Pie* (1999), Paul Weitz, Zide-Perry / Universal Pictures
- Dracula* (1958), Terence Fisher, Hammer Film Productions
- Easy Rider* (1968), Dennis Hopper, BBS / Columbia Pictures
- Flasbdance* (1983), Adrian Lyne, Paramount Pictures
- Gidget* (1959), Paul Wendkos, Columbia Pictures
- Jailhouse Rock* (1957), Richard Thorpe, MGM
- Rebel without a Cause* (1955), Nicholas Ray, Warner Bros.
- Top Gun* (1986), Tony Scott, Paramount Pictures
- The Wild One* (1953), László Benedek, Stanley Kramer Productions



CHAPTER FIVE

A SWEET VAMP

Critiquing the Treatment of Race in *Buffy* and the American Musical Once More (with Feeling)

Jeffrey Middents



With its nondescript high school, architecturally classic Main Street, and single Starbucks café, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer's* Sunnydale evokes contemporary suburban America. Despite the Scooby gang's having to fight off all sorts of demons, the characters are meant to be otherwise everyday people with everyday lives and everyday problems. In a sense, the outer appearance of Sunnydale is that of a utopian (if otherwise nondescript) suburbia: friendly, pretty, and relatively peaceful, if only with an awfully high death rate. The town—blissfully ignorant of its location over a Hellmouth—helped establish the universality that brought *Buffy* a large and committed audience.

But Sunnydale itself cannot exactly be seen as “everyday America,” with its characters representative of “typical American youth,” if for no other reason than everyone seems too white, especially for Southern California, where, according to the 2000 census, nearly half the population is made up of Hispanics, Asian / Pacific Islanders, blacks, and others.¹ This is not to say that the series has been ignorant or unresponsive to representations of “the Other.” One of the show's hallmarks confronts issues of the dangers of Othering through its treatment of demons. Specific key examples include the realization that Oz might be a good person despite his outward appearance and habits as a werewolf in “Phases” (B2.5) from season two, the Scooby gang's acceptance of Tara as a witch in “Family” (B5.6) from season five, and the general acceptance of Anya as a flawed yet human character

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throughout the series once she ceases to be the demon Anyanka. Nonetheless, for the large majority of the first six seasons of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, there is an absence of people of color in Sunnydale. Such an absence is only articulated once, by evil sidekick Mr. Trick (played by K. Todd Freeman) upon his entrance to town during season three's "Faith, Hope and Trick" (B3.3) when he says, "Admittedly, it's not a haven for the brothers, only strictly the Caucasian persuasion in the 'Dale." Trick's comment reflects not just the main cast (who are all at least coded as white) but also, at least until season seven, the cameo and extras casting.²

Several articles have already been written about the lack of racial integration in *Buffy*, particularly Kent Ono's hallmark piece, "To Be a Vampire on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*: Race and ('Other') Socially Marginalizing Positions on Horror TV," Lynne Edwards's "Slaying in Black and White: Kendra as Tragic Mulatta in *Buffy*," and Mary Alice Money's "The Undemonization of Supporting Characters in *Buffy*."³ This chapter does not aim to add much new to the discussion of race within the first five seasons.⁴ By showing how a similar trend occurs in racial critiques of Hollywood musicals of the 1930s, '40s and early '50s, however, I propose that director, creator, and episode lead writer Joss Whedon comments on the racial inequities that can be leveled against both the musical genre and his own television series through a subtle critique that will continue through *Buffy*'s final season.

The "success" of stand-alone musical episodes as an "event" seems to depend largely on how delicately it is treated within the trajectory of the series as a whole.⁵ This process is distinct from and yet related to how audiences have accepted (or not) the cinematic musical. The significant audience skepticism with which some contemporary film musicals have been met may be due to unfamiliarity with the genre. As such, audiences must "buy into" the believability of a world of spontaneous singing and dancing, rather than accept it as a possible generic characteristic. The problem for contemporary audiences is that they must accept the fantastical tenets of this unfamiliar genre at the same time that they are being drawn into the narrative, which may be too much for audiences to embrace simultaneously.⁶ *Buffy* and other television series that have recently employed the musical within single episodes (such as *The Drew Carey Show*, *Scrubs*, *Xena: Warrior Princess*, and *Oz*) can do so only because the audience already is familiar with the characters and realities of the

series as a whole. The special nature of the musical episode depends on the audience's recognition that this is not the normal reality of the series. This necessary "audience participation" in quickly justifying the musical "reality" is acknowledged within "Once More, With Feeling" (B6.7) in the penultimate number, "Life's a Show," when Buffy turns to the camera and invites the audience to "sing along."⁷

The step from the world of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*—and from horror, superhero, and/or fantasy genres in general—to the film musical is actually a very small one when thinking syntactically.⁸ In his article "The American Film Musical as Dual-Focus Narrative," Rick Altman maintains that the main character-driven (often romantic) story line in the musical is interrupted periodically for song-and-dance numbers that, rather than just adding slight momentum to the overall plot, practically halt it for the sake of the *spectacle* of a musical number.⁹ The same can be said of *Buffy*, for which an episode cannot go by without the titular heroine kicking someone's butt. Both dancing and butt-kicking are physically strenuous exercises and, as Altman maintains in his larger book-length work on the musical, often indicate sexual tension, if not outright substituting for sex.¹⁰

Also like *Buffy*, however, the musical is a film genre marked by racial segregation. The classic period of musical production featured very few characters of color, particularly the MGM musicals (such as Stanley Donen's *Singin' in the Rain*,¹¹ from 1952, and Vincente Minnelli's *Meet Me in St. Louis*, from 1944¹²) now seen as defining "integrated" examples of the genre.¹³ Prominent writers on musicals—Altman, Richard Dyer, and Jane Feuer, among others—have noted that these films function within an idealized, fantasy world where problematic social issues do not interfere with or overpower the main romantic story between the male and female leads. The genre seems to demand this to maintain its characteristic happy, light tone. In defining a significant portion of musicals, Altman notes, "The fairy tale world must be a utopia, but in order for that utopia to have substance it must be a limited realm, one seemingly cut off from the outer, evil world, accessible only through the magical action of song, love and belief."¹⁴ Social issues such as acknowledging the problematic constructions of racial interactions would necessarily be part of the "outer, evil world" that would interfere with the entertainment involved in singing and dancing.¹⁵

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As such, most musicals of the '30s, '40s, and early '50s avoided the question of race entirely by simply not showing races mixing, if interacting at all. If a studio musical featured black actors, it was often because the entire cast was black—for example, the enormous cast of Otto Preminger's *Carmen Jones* (1954).¹⁶ If black performers appeared in otherwise all-white musicals, they often simply did that: *perform*, not act. In many cases, such as *Down Argentine Way* (1940) and other Twentieth Century Fox nonintegrated musicals, these performances were featured in breakout sequences unrelated to the plot.¹⁷ In his book-length work *Disintegrating the Music: Black Performance and American Musicals*, Arthur Knight summarizes how Hollywood studios regarded the question of race:

From an African American perspective, the so-called integrated musical [in terms of integrating song and dance within the plot]—whatever its powers and pleasures—was manifestly *not* integrated [racially]. In fact, as the originating texts of *Oklahoma!* and *Carmen Jones* along with *Show Boat*, *Hallelujah!*, and *Porgy and Bess* suggest, the creation of the ultimate utopian feeling in the integrated musical relied on an explicit social-racial segregation, and no quantity of formal intervention could hide that. In a perverse way, though it specifically circumscribed “utopian” aspirations, the “integrated” musical clarified in nation, song, and dance an important and for African Americans painful American circumstance of long standing.¹⁸

Knight's articulations coincide with those of *Buffy* scholars concerned with the series' treatment of race. While Mary Alice Money notes convincingly that the series' fleshing out of supporting characters, both human and demon, “stand[s] in for race in American society,” this does not excuse the conspicuous fact that the Sunnydale population shown to audiences has been white, which is patently unrealistic for a show set in Southern California. By not giving “face time,” much less the opportunity to voice an opinion, racial others can actually be viewed as even more marginal than the vampires and demons that Money would argue stand in for them as American Others. Ono argues that, among the minorities that *do* appear, “*Buffy* relies on what have now come to be conventional depictions of racial (and other) marginalized characters, depictions that may appear to be harmless, if one simply blocks out the similar way marginalized characters appear in everyday news discourse.” Ono's discussion

does not emphasize the fact that the two subjects he examines—Jamaican slayer Kendra and Incan mummy girl Ampada (both from season two, played respectively by Bianca Lawson and Ara Celi)—are not just two of the only people of color, but also happen to be coded through accent and dress as foreign, *non-American* minorities. This trend continues beyond the scope of Ono’s article into further seasons with Giles’s love interest Olivia (Phine Oruche) and first slayer Sineya (Sharon Ferguson), both in season four, as well as the Chinese slayer (Ming Liu) in season five’s “Fool for Love” (B5.7). The only *American* characters of color within the first six seasons are almost all African American: in addition to Mr. Trick, cameo speaking appearances are made by obtuse Initiate member Forrest Gates (Leonard Roberts) in season four, Dawn’s best friend Lisa (Rae’Ven Larrymore Kelly), the ambulance driver who informs Buffy that her mother is dead (Kevin Kristaldi) in “The Body” (B5.16), and Nikki Wood (originally played by April Weeden-Washington), the New York slayer in “Fool for Love.”¹⁹ These characters are in addition to a number of otherwise “faceless” vampires and demons of color as articulated in Ono’s article. Interestingly, there are no Asian American nor Latino American characters in Sunnydale before the arrival of the Potentials in season seven, reflecting a mistaken idea that race is “simply black and white,” without the myriad complexities.²⁰

“Once More, With Feeling” begins its racial critique by addressing Ono’s notion of the “faceless” black vampires. The only two vampires that the audience sees “dusted” during the show happen to be African American—and in this episode, their dusting is conspicuous, since both occur at poignant moments lyrically in the opening number, “Going through the Motions”: the first dies during the pause in “Nothing seems to penetrate my—heart,” while the second explodes in a swirling mass of dust to reveal Sarah Michelle Geller in a close-up singing the last word of the song, “—alive.”²¹ That both vampires are black may be coincidence, but their dusting at the opening of the episode serves to remind us of the series’ usual treatment of “faceless black demons” in order to upend that notion by the end of act 1 with the episode’s central demon, referred to in the published script as “Sweet.”²²

The episode consistently references either standards intrinsic to the (white-centered) film musical tradition or specific films that follow them: the opening orchestral overture within the credits sequence, the overture,

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the long camera takes ensuring maximum coverage of the performers' routines, the chimney sweeps in the background straight out of *Mary Poppins*, the complete Technicolor palette displayed through costuming in "Where Do We Go from Here?" (similar to "You and I" from *Meet Me in St. Louis*), the disparate voiced rendition of "Walk through the Fire" (reminiscent of the quintet version of "Tonight" in *West Side Story*), even the *Oklahoma!*-inspired ballet in the middle of the episode.²³ Most explicitly, Xander and Anya's duet, "I'll Never Tell," clearly harks back to the '40s-style sexual-battle-through-song-and-dance numbers associated with Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers and even finishes with a fall onto a sofa that references the closing of "Good Mornin'" from *Singin' in the Rain*.²⁴ This even causes Anya to despair as she recognizes the "outdated" nature of the tune: "Clearly our number is a retro pastiche that's never going to be a breakaway pop hit." Even when the episode strays from the cinematic nostalgia represented, the musical styles performed by the main cast characters are also fairly "white-centric": the guitar-driven rock behind Anya's "Bunnies" and Spike's "Rest in Peace," the folk-inspired performances by Tara in "Under Your Spell" and Giles in "Standing," and (to use Anya's words) the "breakaway pop" of both of Buffy's major solo numbers, "Going through the Motions" and "Something to Sing About."

The episode takes a decided turn with the full introduction of Sweet in the jazz-inspired song "What You Feel." By itself, perhaps neither the character nor the performance would be coded as particularly "black," since although the actor actually *is* African American, he is completely covered in red makeup and wears ice-blue contact lenses. Within the context of the episode as a whole, however, the differences stand in relief. The song stands apart from the remainder of the soundtrack in two significant ways. First, in referencing jazz, the syncopated rhythms of "What You Feel" call attention to a musical tradition generally overlooked within the film musical, primarily its association with African American origins.²⁵ This is also a musical first for the series, which in general does not feature music typically associated with nonwhite American ethnicities, even those that have nonetheless crossed over into mainstream music, such as hip-hop, reggae, or *corrido*.²⁶ Sweet also wears a brightly colorful outfit that is something akin to a zoot suit, which was emblematic of an ethnic identity—largely, but not exclusively, Chicano—during World War II. More notably, however, is the quality of actor Hinton Battle's performance.

While part of the fascination with the episode is that each of the regular actors actually sings his or her own part (and thereby provides verisimilitude for the concept that a demon is making everyone in Sunnydale sing, whether they can or not), Battle's vocal quality and performance single him out as the sole professional performer among the cast by displaying why he is a three-time Tony Award-winning singer and dancer.²⁷

Battle's singular performance comes dangerously close to what critic Donald Bogle calls "the Negro Entertainment Syndrome," typical of 1940s Hollywood films and particularly evident in musicals, where black characters would be featured performers instead of integral to the narrative: "Rather than include him in the regular plot of the movie and have to stop in the middle of the serving scene while a Negro sang his song, producers introduced specific musical interludes in which the entertainer could perform unhampered by a story line."²⁸ Hence black characters made quick entrances and exits but otherwise were featured only as entertainers, not characters. This made it very simple for theaters that refused to show pictures with black characters (generally theaters in the South) to cut out the performance sequence without detracting from the overall plot. The Nicholas Brothers' performance in the Fox nonintegrated musical *Down Argentine Way* (1940) serves as a good example of this: far more showstopping than any of the performances by lead actors Betty Grable or Don Ameche, the Nicholas Brothers steal the movie with a superior tap number. While this performance was not integral to the plot, Sean Griffin points out that it was nonetheless so important to the success of the film that newspapers advertised as to what time the number would appear. Other black actors of the period, including Lena Horne, Duke Ellington, and Cab Calloway, also appeared in musicals in "safe" entertainer roles, with superior performances that rose above but were otherwise isolated from the white-centered plot.

Battle's performance differs—within both the Buffyverse and the discourse of black entertainers in white musicals—in that Sweet is not just an entertainer but indeed the most powerful character in the episode. Summoned unwittingly by Xander, Sweet uses his powers to affect all characters, human and demon, within Sunnydale; the evil nature of this power is that all the secrets that could not be said are instead sung aloud. Unlike the African American vampires dusted at the beginning of the episode, Sweet is powerful enough to not let a single act of violence come to

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him. Even Buffy must *sing* “Life’s a Show” rather than simply fight once she encounters Sweet. More to the point, although he is thwarted in his attempt to drag Dawn off as his new bride, *Sweet does not lose*. Although he says “Big smiles everyone, you beat the bad guy,” this is stated ironically, punctuated by Sweet’s final vamp, the reprise of “What You Feel,” which gives the episode its title: “And there’s not a one / Who can say this ended well. / All those secrets you’ve been concealing, / Say you’re happy now—once more, with feeling.” Unlike the previous characters of color on the show, who are either staked (Mr. Trick and countless “faceless” vampires), dispensed with (Kendra, Ampada, Forrest, Nikki Wood), or simply ambiguously left to fade away (Olivia), Sweet leaves of his own volition. Sweet’s presence lingers, however, as evidenced through the cast’s needing to sing “Where Do We Go from Here?” even after his departure.

The main characters are left unsteady and shaken up because they must now confront the future with the knowledge obtained from these previously concealed secrets; I would argue that one of these secrets involves the show’s previous refusal to address race in the otherwise “blissfully ignorant” previous five seasons. As stated earlier, up until season six, characters of color are few and far between; in the final season, however, many more characters of color start to appear in extended, higher-profile roles. If the musical episode is a subtle commentary on race, however, this same subtlety is admirably maintained throughout the final season: *Buffy* deals with the race issue by not making it an issue at all, by slowly adding significant characters of color to the cast without explicit fanfare. The introduction of Robin Wood, son of former slayer Nikki, provides a love interest first for Buffy, then for Faith, and he becomes a major player in the ultimate demise of The First. As noted above, Nikki Wood only finally gains an actual voice when played by K. D. Aubert in season seven, when she speaks to her son as The First in “First Date.”²⁹ The same episode also features singer-actress Ashanti playing Lissa, a young woman whom Xander becomes interested in and tries to date before discovering she is a demon. Most notably, the Potentials (those next-to-be-called) who are summoned to battle in Sunnydale feature not only slayers of different nationalities (the British Molly and the Chinese Chao-Ahn, played respectively by Clara Bryant and Kristy Wu) but also a number of American races: clearly both Chloe and Rona (played respectively by Lalaine and Indigo) are characters of color (both Latina and black), who play major

and complicated supporting roles in the final showdown.³⁰ It seems as if the show finally commits to addressing the complicated issue of race by simply and subtly developing these new characters that are complex, vulnerable, and developed as *characters* rather than as anonymous fodder.

Given Willow's empowerment of *all* potential slayers in season seven, and the overall message that Buffy is not as much a superhero as someone simply channeling a power that all women have inside, Whedon wisely chose to subtly readdress the conspicuous absence of multiple ethnicities on the series through use of the musical genre. While we as audience members "can sing along" with the musical "Kum Ba Ya-Yas" of "Once More, With Feeling," we can also swallow the racial implications that Sweet's outstanding vamp reveals: that characters of color on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* are not all "faceless" vampires, "tragic mulattas," or foreign imports, but may also have some memorable power themselves.

* * *

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Notes

1. According to the 2000 census, the California population is 48.3 percent white, 31.5 percent Hispanic, 12.5 percent Asian / Pacific Islander, 6.7 percent black, and 1.0 percent "other." State of California, Department of Finance, *California Current Population Survey Report: March 2001 Data* (Sacramento, February 2002), 1.

2. Although there has been some debate as to whether Charisma Carpenter is Latina, for the purposes of this article I am labeling her as "white," since the character Cordelia is not coded ethnically.

3. Kent A. Ono, "To Be a Vampire on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*: Race and ('Other') Socially Marginalizing Positions on Horror TV," in *Fantasy Girls: Gender in the New Universe of Science Fiction and Fantasy Television*, ed. Elyce Rae

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Helford (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 163–86; Lynne Edwards, “Slaying in Black and White: Kendra as Tragic Mulatta in *Buffy*,” in *Fighting the Forces: What’s at Stake in Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, ed. Rhonda V. Wilcox and David Lavery (Lanham, Md.: Rowan & Littlefield, 2002), 85–97; Mary Alice Money, “The Undemonization of Supporting Characters in *Buffy*,” in *Fighting the Forces*, Wilcox and Lavery, 98–107.

4. This article is also not concerned with addressing racial problematics in the spin-off show *Angel*, which features the introduction in season two of black character Charles Gunn, played by Panamanian American actor J. August Richards.

5. An excellent article, “It May Look Like a Living Room . . . : The Musical Number and the Sitcom,” by Robynn J. Stilwell (*ECHO* 5.1, spring 2003), traces the history of the musical number within television comedies; however, Stilwell dismisses the episode in *Buffy* as being “about magic and fantasy to begin with” without examining the nature of such episodes within television audience reception.

6. This would also explain the failure of the musical-centered series *Cop Rock* (1990).

7. “Once More, With Feeling.” *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Season 6). Dir. Joss Whedon. DVD. Twentieth Century Fox, 2001.

8. In discussing syntax, I am referencing Rick Altman’s seminal work on film genre, “A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Film Genre,” in *Film Theory and Criticism*, 6th ed., ed. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 689: “The distinction between the semantic and the syntactic, in the way that I have defined it here, thus corresponds to a distinction between the primary, linguistic elements of which all texts are made and the secondary, textual meanings that are sometimes constructed by virtue of the syntactic bonds established between primary elements.”

9. Rick Altman, “The American Film Musical as Dual-Focus Narrative,” *The American Film Musical* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 16.

10. Likewise, the connection between sex and slaying in *Buffy* is made explicit during Faith’s interaction with Xander during “The Zeppo” (Dir. James Whitmore Jr., Twentieth Century Fox Television, 1999).

11. Gene Kelly and Stanley Donen, dir., *Singin’ in the Rain*, 1952 (DVD, Warner Home Video, 2002). Although Rita Moreno gets a title credit for her costarring role in *Singin’*, the character Zelda Zanders is not coded as Latina at all; it would not be until her role in 1958’s *West Side Story* that she would be identified as a singing, dancing Puerto Rican actor.

12. Vincente Minnelli, dir., *Meet Me in St. Louis*, 1944 (DVD, Warner Home Video, 2004).

13. Here, “integrated” refers to the type of musical, one where the film’s musical numbers are “integrated” into the plot itself.

14. Altman, *American Film Musical*, 158.

15. Sean Griffin notes Twentieth Century Fox's nonintegrated musicals as exceptions to this viewpoint in "The Gang's All Here: Generic versus Racial Integration in the 1940s Musical," *Cinema Journal* 42.1 (fall 2002): 21–45. Other exceptions might include Paul Robeson's performance in 1936's *Show Boat* and Bill Robinson as Mr. Bojangles in the Shirley Temple vehicles.

16. Otto Preminger, dir., *Carmen Jones*, 1954 (DVD, Twentieth Century Fox, 2002).

17. Irving Cummings, dir., *Down Argentine Way*, 1940 (DVD, Twentieth Century Fox, 2006). The fascinating approach to race used in the spectacles of Fox musicals is thoroughly detailed in Griffin's "The Gang's All Here."

18. Arthur Knight, *Disintegrating the Musical: Black Performance and American Musical Film* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2002), 16.

19. Interestingly, little has been written about the season-four Thanksgiving episode "Pangs" (dir. Michael Lange, Twentieth Century Fox, 1999), which explicitly addresses tensions between Native Americans and the founders of Sunnydale. This episode is referenced by Anya in "One More, With Feeling" when she sings of Xander in "I'll Never Tell": "His penis got diseases from a Shumash tribe." Likewise, no one has addressed the complicated racial dynamics surrounding the Romani character Jenny Calendar (*Robia La Morte*). Certainly both issues deserve attention in future *Buffy* studies concerning race.

20. Tellingly, the only Asian American I could find while quickly looking through the series is the unnamed girl, played by Korean American Nicole Bilderback, whose body is quickly drained of blood using the Master's machine in "The Wish" . . . which is, of course, in a parallel universe.

21. "Once More, With Feeling." *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Season 6). Dir. Joss Whedon. DVD. Twentieth Century Fox, 2001.

22. It is unclear how much the name "Sweet" is meant to be significant. The demon is not named within the episode; when Buffy asks for a name, he replies, "I have a hundred." The online Buffy Trivia Guide indicates an apocryphal origin for the name: "As the credits say "Sweet [slang for "cool, awesome"] Make-Up By . . . ' everyone assumed the character was named Sweet." However, the published shooting script for the episode indicates the following description for the first entrance of the character at the end of act 1: "A man nattily dressed in a retro kind of suit, almost a zoot suit. . . . No one knows his name, but we will call him SWEET" (*Once More, with Feeling: The Script Book* [New York: Simon Pulse, 2002], 16). The name's presence in the script may intentionally reference the seminal blaxploitation film *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song* (dir. Melvin Van Peebles, 1970; DVD, Cinemation Industries, 2003), where a black hustler witnesses the beating of an innocent black man by white cops, goes on the run from

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the police force that is after him, and survives to become a legend. Though there are few similarities between the film and “Once More, With Feeling,” the *Buffy* episode may be playing on *Sweet Sweetback’s* revolutionary depiction of a strong black man who does not submit to a white-dominated narrative viewpoint. Van Peebles has said that he made the film to “get the Man’s foot out of my ass” and that “To get the Man’s foot out of my ass means to me logically to get the Man’s foot out of all of our black asses” (*The Making of Sweet Sweetback’s Baadasssss Song* [New York: Lancer Books, 1972], 12). The film’s militantly prophetic final title cards declaring “WATCH OUT—A BAAD ASSSSS NIGGER IS COMING BACK TO COLLECT SOME DUES!” was a lightning rod for black-produced pictures, ushering in the era of the “blaxploitation” film but, more importantly, also Hollywood’s recognition of a black audience. The name might also refer to the voodoo-knowledgeable jazz musician Toots Sweet from the film *Angel Heart* (dir. Alan Parker, 1987; DVD, Lions Gate, 2004).

23. *Mary Poppins*, dir. Dave Brossart and Robert Stevenson, 1964 (DVD, Walt Disney Video, 2004); *West Side Story*, dir. Jerome Robbins and Robert Wise, 1961 (DVD, MGM Video, 2003); *Oklahoma!* dir. Fred Zinnemann, 1955 (DVD, Twentieth Century Fox, 2005).

24. The episode’s use of explicit sexual double entendres within the song lyrics, necessary for broadcast television, also relates to Hollywood maneuvering around Hays Code censors during the ’40s and ’50s. This is most clearly seen during “I’ll Never Tell” (the “tight embrace”) and “Under Your Spell” (particularly the syllabic breaking of the last word in Tara’s line “surging like the sea / spread beneath my [W]illow tree / You make me complete”).

25. Although several traditional musicals reference jazz—most notably Vicente Minnelli’s *An American in Paris* with its George Gershwin song catalog—they are racially “whitewashed,” with virtually no black characters performing on-screen.

26. The sole exception to the use of “nonwhite” music occurs in “Listening to Fear” (dir. David Solomon, Twentieth Century Fox, 2000), when Buffy turns on the radio while washing dishes and listens to salsa. This uncharacteristic music, however, functions as counterpoint: we as viewers are struck by the anomaly that the radio is tuned to such music in the first place (since no one has given any prior indication of affection for Latin music) before we find the happy, peppy beat only heightens the sobbing that Buffy experiences thinking about her mother’s illness.

27. *Sophisticated Ladies*, 1981; *The Tap Dance Kid*, 1984; *Miss Saigon*, 1991. No disrespect is meant to the remainder of the cast with this comment; fans were particularly fascinated by the wonderful vocal talents of Amber Benson, Emma Caulfield, and James Marsters—although no one was surprised that Anthony

Stewart Head was an excellent singer . . . and that Sarah Michelle Gellar is, at least musically, not quite the superpower that she is in the show.

28. Donald Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films* (New York: Continuum Books, 1973), 119.

29. "First Date." *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Season 7). Dir. David Grossman. DVD. Twentieth Century Fox, 2003.

30. This analysis does not include the slayerette and Willow's new love interest Kennedy, who while not explicitly coded with a particular race in the series is played by Chicana actress Iyari Limón.

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CHAPTER SIX

CONCEALING TRUTHS Rhetorical Questions in “Once More, With Feeling”

Cynthea Masson



“

Am I crazy? / Am I dreamin'? / Am I marrying a demon?¹ Where else but on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* could these questions not only be posed but sung as “a retro pastiche”? Questions abound in “Once More, With Feeling” (B6.7);¹ direct answers, however, are far less forthcoming. If, as J. M. Kertzer posits regarding rhetorical questions, “An answer is a form of closure,”² and if *Buffy* “is a series that repeatedly plays with the question of closure, of finality, of ending, of death,”³ then the rhetorical questions and answers (or lack thereof) in “Once More, With Feeling” offer a means to resist closure in the only *Buffy* episode whose ending literally inscribes “The End” and draws the cinematic curtains across its final frame. Commentary on *Buffy*’s musical episode typically focuses on the revelations of truths that form the content of the songs. Joss Whedon himself, as quoted in the script book to “Once More, With Feeling,” says “I knew that this would be the episode where Buffy told her friends that she’d been in Heaven and all the other truths would come out.”⁴ Richard Albright aptly synthesizes the generally accepted scholarly view on this episode when he states, “We soon realize that each of the characters sings what they secretly feel, so the songs represent the real and the true.”⁵ Or, as Anne Billson puts it, the characters are “compelled to blurt out their innermost secrets in song.”⁶ Though these readings offer an apt description of the episode’s text—the songs, in this case—they do not adequately explore the subtext evident in the rhetorical



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structure of the lyrics. If, as Rhonda Wilcox argues, the musical device of the episode “works like a soliloquy, in that we can be assured we will hear the interior truth for that character,” then another aspect of the soliloquy should be considered.⁷ According to Anthony J. Gilbert, soliloquies often do more than provide the audience with “direct access to the character’s thoughts.”⁸ Instead, a soliloquy can “expose a conflict of motives”⁹ when delivered by a character “who does not fully understand the meaning of what he says.”¹⁰ In such situations, the speaker of a soliloquy “may say what he wants to believe is true, at a conscious level, but which he knows to be false, at an unconscious level.”¹¹ “Outside of awareness,” Gilbert argues, “the speaker is engaged in a dialogue with the self that reveals and conceals truth”¹² in a “paradox of utterance.”¹³ Acts of questioning in “Once More, With Feeling” similarly work paradoxically both to reveal and conceal truths. Exploring the questions and answers of the songs, therefore, provides an alternative perspective on what Matthew Pateman describes as “the eagerly awaited, massively enjoyed and subsequently favorite episode of many a *Buffy* fan.”¹⁴ The text or lyrics of a song may explicitly reveal one truth, but the rhetorical structure of the song’s questions and implied answers (or lack thereof) implicitly conceal another.

The first questions asked in “Once More, With Feeling” are Buffy’s in the opening song “Going through the Motions”: “Will I stay this way forever? / Sleepwalk through my life’s endeavor?”¹⁵ In terms of the truth Buffy is revealing, these questions assert her fear that she is doomed to walk mechanically through life for years to come. This fear leads Buffy to an apparently truthful realization: “I don’t want to be going through the motions. . . . I just want to be alive.” Though Albright argues that “this song actually provides a rare opportunity for a direct view of Buffy’s inner feelings,”¹⁶ I propose that the song’s rhetorical questions and implied responses simultaneously lead to an unspoken (though covertly implied) paradox—not that Buffy wants to be *alive* (as the final word of the song emphasizes with its extended note) but that she wishes she were still dead. After all, the song—an upbeat “pure Disney number,”¹⁷ as Whedon has called it—may, in and of itself, be an example of Buffy merely going through the musical motions, trying to convince herself and her audience that she wants to be alive when, in fact, she would rather be dead. Buffy is, as Anne Billson says, “trapped in a state of post-resurrection depression.”¹⁸ She views her current life as hell. Indeed, her first post-resurrection words

pose the question, “Is this hell?” (“Bargaining Part 2,” B6.2); shortly thereafter, when discussing her resurrected life with Spike in “After Life” (B6.3), she states directly, “this is hell.” This life—this hell—may be one that Buffy wishes to escape. The questions she sings in “Going through the Motions” do not require a response from an audience—they are rhetorical; they make assertions and imply responses without soliciting direct answers. As Kertzer explains, a rhetorical question can be “an indirect assertion . . . posed in such a way as to suggest its own reply or to create an effect, rather than to solicit an answer.”¹⁹ Or, as Angeliki Athanasiadou states, “As a general remark one could say that in rhetorical questions the speaker is unmistakably affirmative towards the proposition, i.e. the sentence is assertory.”²⁰ Thus, the overt response asserted by Buffy’s questions is *yes*—*yes, I will stay this way forever; yes, I will sleepwalk through my life’s endeavor*. Buffy asserts that she will remain in a state of apathy forever. However, an alternative, covert response is *no*—that is, if she were to die again (to sacrifice her life again), she would be freed from the tedium of her post-resurrection depression and her “life’s endeavor.”

Todd Williams likewise allows for the possibility that Buffy would prefer to be dead: “She ends the song by singing, ‘I just want to be / alive.’ But does she? She insists that she does not want to lose all her drive, but Buffy’s struggle is one of competing drives. Throughout the episode, Buffy faces this age old question of ‘To be or not to be.’”²¹ Williams’s Shakespearean allusion here calls to mind Gilbert’s discussion of another of Hamlet’s soliloquies (at 4.4.31–66): “The implication of what Hamlet says is in effect a denial of what he says explicitly. This technique of undercutting assertions by implicit ambiguity . . . allows Hamlet to replay those negative thoughts that are the voice of his father within him, demanding revenge, but at the same time it avoids the necessity of actually doing anything about the voice.”²² In Buffy’s song, she explicitly claims a desire to be alive (perhaps in response to the voice of the Scoobies within her); however, the words “penetrate my heart” and “crawl out of your grave” (which link her current state to a vampiric condition) combined with the ambiguity of her unanswered questions imply a nostalgia for death or cessation of life as she knows it, not a shift toward reclaiming her role as the Chosen One. Buffy jokes about her death to Xander in “Life Serial” (B6.5): “You saved me from having to accept Giles’s offer to work at the Magic Box. I mean, retail? I’d rather be dead . . . again.” Similarly,

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in “All the Way” (B6.6), in response to Dawn’s request for a tattoo, Buffy says, “Over my dead body. The kind that doesn’t come back.” Making jokes on the subject allows Buffy to toy with the idea of dying again rather than to affirm a death wish directly. The lyrics of her first song likewise are shadowed by death without explicitly admitting a desire to die again. Certainly, she appears not to care about her life’s endeavor while singing “Going through the Motions” given her response to the question posed to her by the “Handsome Young Victim Man”: “How can I repay—?” he asks; however, he does not even get the chance to complete his sentence before Buffy responds, “Whatever.” By avoiding direct, explicit answers both to her own questions and to the question posed to her in this song, Buffy temporarily avoids taking action toward renewing her life, thus leaving open the possibility of ending it.

Behind the questions posed and statements sung by Buffy in “Going through the Motions” potentially lies another question: “Is today the day I die?” This question is first posed in a conversation between Spike and Buffy in season five’s “Fool for Love” (B5.7)—a dialogue that the lyrics of “Going through the Motions” arguably echo: “You think we’re dancing?” Buffy asks. Spike responds, “That’s all we’ve ever done. The only thing about the dance is you never get to stop. Every day you wake up, it’s the same bloody question that haunts you: Is today the day I die? Death is on your heels. . . . And part of you wants it—not only to stop the fear and uncertainty, but because you’re just a little bit in love with it. Death is your art. You make it with your hands, day after day.” The sentiment of Spike’s speech—the figurative idea that day after day Buffy dances with death—is echoed in Buffy’s song lyrics, “Every single night, the same arrangement / I go out and fight the fight.” Only this time Buffy is literally dancing through her resurrected life while “making shows of trading blows” and “going through the motions” of her former self. Death is no longer Buffy’s figurative art: in “Going through the Motions,” the literal art of music, lyrics, and choreography reveals Buffy’s slaying to be mere mechanical gestures that show none of the passionate energy or creative moves typically associated with her slaying. Spike’s words from “Fool for Love” not only foreshadow Buffy’s approaching death in “The Gift” (B5.22) but also allude (coincidentally, perhaps) to her near-death by dancing in “Once More, With Feeling.” Buffy’s choice to sacrifice herself to save Dawn at the end of season five is, in effect, a silent but affirmative response to the

question that continues to haunt her. As Buffy reveals to Spike in “After Life” (B6.3), “I think I was in heaven. And now I’m not. I was torn out of there. Pulled out—by my friends.” Her resurrection at the beginning of season six was not her choice—her choice was to die, and having chosen death, she found a peaceful afterlife in heaven. Buffy’s “paradox of utterance”²³ in “Going through the Motions” is, thus, reminiscent of the “Shanshu” paradox from *Angel*—that is, Buffy desires both life and death or, more accurately, life through death.²⁴ In order to live again, to escape her current life in hell, she must die again.

At the Magic Box the following morning, the talking and singing also hint at unconscious truths or desires that surface rhetorically only to be submerged consciously. In response to Giles’s question “What did you sing about?” Buffy responds, “I don’t remember.” This, by all appearances, is an outright lie given that the others remember what they sang. Anya, for example, claims, “Xander and I were fighting about Monkey Trouble,” and Dawn says she sang about math. Richard Albright believes that Buffy lies to the other Scoobies because she “wants to spare their feelings.”²⁵ But I wonder whether Buffy, in fact, *does* forget—simply in the sense that she’s not paying attention to her own song lyrics or the clichéd sentiments that mask her death wish. After all, she could have said, “I sang about slaying” (or vampires, or whatever), but instead she claims she doesn’t remember—a claim that could (*should* even) raise the suspicions of the other Scoobies rather than work to spare their feelings. I offer this as a possibility because a similar disjuncture between the lyrics as sung and Buffy’s apparent memory of them occurs in the same scene after the Scoobies sing “I’ve Got a Theory.” Having heard the others sing out theories ranging from demons to bunnies, Buffy sings, “It doesn’t matter. What can’t we face if we’re together?” Yet immediately after the song Buffy asks, “So what is it? What’s causing it?” to which Giles replies, “I thought it didn’t matter.” *He* heard what she sang, but did *she* hear it? And if she did hear it, perhaps she doesn’t care what she sang or, worse, doesn’t care if they’re still together. Perhaps her lyrical sentiments in “I’ve Got a Theory” are yet another example of going through the motions, albeit in clichéd song lyrics—that is, Buffy sings about facing dangers *together* simply because that is what she believes the Scoobies expect her to say, not what she herself believes to be true.

Buffy’s confident words—her *apparent* truth of faith in togetherness—are not so confident or truthful when viewed rhetorically. Gregory

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Stevenson claims that “Buffy acknowledges the strength she has drawn from her community when she sings, ‘What can’t we face if we’re together? / What’s in this place that we can’t weather?’”²⁶ However, Buffy doesn’t actually state that all will be well or that togetherness will save the day in her portion of “I’ve Got a Theory.” Instead, she asks rhetorical questions that overtly assert togetherness while covertly gesturing toward her ongoing separation from the group. *What can’t we face if we’re together? / What’s in this place that we can’t weather?*—the implied answer to these questions is “nothing” (“except for bunnies,” as Anya sings). The covert or unspoken answer, however, is that Buffy has faced both death and resurrection alone. So, while the others offer up a variety of possible theories, Buffy asks questions that act as assertions and, thereby, negate all but one implied truthful (but inherently false) response. As Athanasiadou explains, “The speaker of a rhetorical question does not expect the hearer to answer, and what is more, he would in certain situations not even want the hearer to answer for fear of not getting the answer that is in accordance with the presupposed truth.”²⁷ If Buffy were to speak a truthful answer to these questions, that answer would be her resurrected life. Moreover, if she were to allow for a range of answers—that is, if she were to ask information questions that elicit answers, rather than rhetorical questions that imply a presupposed truth—the others would be forced either to answer with hitherto unspoken truths or to lie blatantly. (For example, Xander would have to admit to or lie about his fear of marriage; Willow would have to admit to or lie about her abuse of magic.) No one is ready to admit through direct statement that the implied togetherness (among the Scoobies and within couples) is breaking down. Wilcox likewise notes a disjunction in Buffy’s contribution to this song: “The superficial vocal and visual togetherness . . . is undercut lyrically by Buffy’s theory that ‘it doesn’t matter’; and though she then seems to say we don’t need to care because we can be confident of success, she also adds that, since these are ‘the same old trips, why should we care?’”²⁸ “Why should we care?” is, of course, yet another rhetorical question. Buffy does not expect or even want a direct answer to this question. After all, a direct answer might be, “We shouldn’t,” which would force the Scoobies to examine individual desires and group dynamics. Faced with only a rhetorical question, no one needs to provide a reason to care. Each member of the group can thereby continue to go through the motions—in effect, to lie both to themselves

and to the others—without the necessity of revealing personal truths that contribute to the group’s dysfunction.

A similar effect with regard to Buffy’s questions occurs in the context of Giles’s song “Standing,” in which Giles admits he is standing in the way of Buffy’s progress through life. Notably, Giles’s song comprises a series of statements rather than questions; indeed, he may be the only person in the episode willing to face necessary truths through direct statement. Nonetheless, questions do form part of the dialogue prior to the song. Giles asks Buffy, “Have you spoken with Dawn at all about the incident at Halloween?” This is a simple yes-no question to which Buffy responds neither yes nor no, but instead says, “I thought you took care of that.” She avoids a direct response to the question Giles poses to her and thereby avoids acknowledging her failure to act responsibly as Dawn’s guardian. Giles then responds, “Right,” and Buffy asks, “What would I do without you?” To Buffy, this question is rhetorical—she doesn’t expect an answer from Giles because she doesn’t expect Giles to leave. Indeed, she states as much at the end of “Life Serial” (B6.5) when she says to Giles, “It makes me feel safe knowing you’re always gonna be here.” To Buffy, Giles’s departure is unthinkable; the choice of a rhetorical question allows her to circumvent a response from him and to avoid both the possibility of his absence and the reality of her responsibilities. Simultaneously, it allows her to avoid acknowledging that she needs—perhaps even desires—the chance to make her own choices about life or death without interference from a father figure or, indeed, from anyone.

To Giles, however, Buffy’s question elicits his song about his need to leave—he speaks the very truth Buffy is unwilling either to face or state directly. As Jes Battis explains, “Giles is willing to admit his own inefficacy as a father, singing . . . ‘Wish I could play the father / . . . But now I understand / I’m standing in the way.’”²⁹ Buffy’s response to Giles’s song is yet another question that works to avoid his stated truth: “Did you just say something?” she asks him immediately after his song. Buffy’s response to Giles does not fit within the parameters established elsewhere in the episode. That is, several characters acknowledge that they have heard and understood lyrics sung by someone else. As I already noted, Giles heard Buffy when she sang, “It doesn’t matter.” Likewise, Xander and Anya must have heard each other when singing “I’ll Never Tell” given that they repeat phrases of one another’s lyrics to Giles in the street scene

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(just prior to “The Parking Ticket” song): Xander says to Anya, “My eyes are not beady!” and Anya says, “My toes are not hairy.” Moreover, Buffy hears Spike’s lyrics in “Rest in Peace,” later saying to him, “I thought you wanted me to stay away from you. Isn’t that what you sang?” Arguably, Buffy’s apparent inability to hear the lyrics of “Standing” represents a moment of subconscious resistance to a temporarily unspeakable truth. She does not want—is not *yet* ready—to hear or speak truthful answers to the questions she poses or those posed to her.

Similarly, I would argue that at a subconscious level Tara is not yet ready to hear a response to the question she poses to Willow in “Under Your Spell”: “I’m under your spell. / How else can it be / anyone would notice me?” The implied assertion is that Willow’s love—expressed figuratively here as Willow’s spell—positively affects the way others see Tara. What Tara does not yet recognize is that Willow’s literal spell affects the way Tara currently sees Willow. Whether understood figuratively or literally, the spell and its accompanying rhetorical question (which, once again, preempts response) imply a lack of self-worth or self-confidence on Tara’s part. This insecurity is emphasized immediately before her song when Tara expresses surprise at the fact that some “boys” were checking her out: “I know exactly what they see in me,” Tara says to Willow. “*You.*” Tara cannot see herself *as* herself alone, without Willow—even though this is the sense of self that Tara needs to recover. Lorna Jowett proposes that “Tara sometimes tends to lack subjectivity, functioning simply as an adjunct to her partner.”³⁰ “Under Your Spell” Jowett explains, “could . . . suggest Tara accepts her ‘place’ as subordinate in the relationship.”³¹ Tara’s apparent contentment, which is emphasized by her cheerful tone and fluid movements in the song, would support Jowett’s reading. However, her current (and temporary) inability to recognize or express discontent with the power imbalance in their relationship is arguably due to Willow’s literal spell rather than Tara’s conscious acceptance of a subordinate role. After all, Tara has already expressed concerns about Willow’s abuse of magic in “All the Way” (B6.6)—an expression of opinion that leads to the very argument Willow later erases with the memory spell. Willow’s figurative and literal spell over Tara could be further emphasized in “Once More, With Feeling” with a simple revision of punctuation to the song lyrics: “I’m under your spell. / How else can it be? / Anyone would notice me.”³² In other words, Tara knows no other way of being with Willow

than under Willow's spell. In "Once More, With Feeling," Tara is not yet ready to recognize consciously the danger in a dynamic that pairs her own lack of self-worth with her lover's desire for power or control over her—a dynamic accomplished, in part, by literal magic. Of course, Willow's literal spell affects only Tara's memory, not her attractiveness to passersby; however, this distinction between the literal and figurative spell is one that Tara is currently unable to make. If she could (and, indeed, when she does), she would have to answer her question based on her sense of self independent of her relationship with Willow—an answer that could require ending the relationship.

The phrase "I'm under your spell" clearly points not only to the metaphorical magic of Willow and Tara's love (a conceit used throughout the series in the development of their relationship) but also, at this point unbeknownst to Tara, to the literal memory spell Willow has cast on her. Notably, in the original script, an additional question is posed. Instead of "I'm under your spell," the *script* lyrics ask, "Am I under your spell?"³³ Although the scripted question is not asked aloud in the episode itself, it arguably remains the concealed question that Tara cannot bring herself to ask. In his discussion of secrecy and elusive answers as potential effects of rhetorical questions, Kertzer claims, "The easiest way to accomplish these effects is to ask a rhetorical question whose terms are already metaphorical. The question then cannot be satisfied with a literal answer and the trope becomes metaleptic: it makes figurative use of a metaphor."³⁴ In this case, when Tara (in the original script) asks the metaphorical and rhetorical question "Am I under your spell?" the implied asserted response "Yes, you are" would likewise be understood metaphorically. Tara cannot ask a literal question or receive a literal response because she does not recognize on a conscious level (is not ready to recognize) that Willow is abusing her. Nonetheless, the metaphorical lyrics allow the possibility that Tara glimpses the truth at a subconscious level. Todd Williams also discusses this disparity between the metaphorical and literal: "When Tara sings," explains Williams, "she expresses her love in metaphor, but also, she expresses her deepest fears that some aspects of their relationship are cheapened by Willow's use of magic."³⁵ Thus, within the metaphorical context and immediately after the phrase "under your spell," Tara poses a rhetorical question ("How else can it be anyone would notice me?") that structurally negates a literal, truthful response from Willow and thereby works to

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maintain the metaphorical lie of magically perfect love. Although Willow knows the truth, she does not reveal it; she neither alleviates Tara's insecurities nor reveals any of her own. Indeed, Willow does not sing to Tara at all. Thus, despite the apparent love song implications of "Under Your Spell," and despite the fact that Willow and Tara begin to have sex by the end of the song (in what Jowett calls "the most erotic scene between Willow and Tara"³⁶), this relationship is clearly not one based on truth or respect. As Wilcox says, "It is worth noting that Willow sings very little in this episode; aside from the extratextual reason of [actress] Alyson Hannigan's request not to [sing], in the context of the episode it means that we are not given too direct an indication of Willow's coming darkness."³⁷ We are, however, directly exposed to Willow's abuse of Tara's memory and, indirectly (via rhetorical questions) exposed to the problematic power dynamics of their relationship. Later, when Tara discovers that she *is* under Willow's literal spell, she asks in song, "God, how can this be, / playing with my memory? . . . Willow, don't you see? / There'll be nothing left of me." In asking *these* questions, Tara is able to assert the formerly unbearable truth, acknowledging that the person she loves has consumed her (in this case, by erasing a portion of her memory, just as Glory had done). In asking Willow whether she sees, Tara realizes that Willow is blind to the effects of her actions. By the next episode ("Tabula Rasa," B6.8), Tara will confront Willow directly with similar (nonrhetorical) questions and, shortly thereafter, remove herself from Willow's abusive power.

The question Tara poses to Willow before singing "Under Your Spell" likewise works to imply fears beyond the explicit, literal meaning of the words. As she walks with Willow through the park, Tara asks, "Do we have any books at all at home?" Although the question appears to require a straightforward yes or no answer, the overall context suggests otherwise. Tara has no literal need to ask this question, given that she already knows that the answer is not relevant to the circumstance. That is, she *should* already understand—just as the audience does—that verbalizing the need to leave the Magic Box to get books at home was merely an *excuse* for Willow and Tara to be alone and, presumably, have sex. Xander certainly understands this given his comments to Buffy and Giles in a follow-up scene (opened as a smash cut from Willow and Tara's sex scene): "Willow and Tara. You see the way they were with each other? The get-a-roominess of them. I'll bet they're—singing." (He says "singing" only because he real-

izes Dawn is listening.) Moreover, it was Tara herself who came up with the excuse in the first place—that is, she is the one who, back at the Magic Box, brings up the pretense for leaving: “That’s right! The, the volume! The text!” she says and then, shortly thereafter, announces, “We just have a few volumes at the house that deal with mystical chants, bacchanals . . . might be relevant.” If anyone should be questioning the legitimacy of this claim, it’s Willow, not Tara. So why does Tara ask Willow whether they have books at home? One explanation involves Tara’s insecurities with the relationship—insecurities that run as far back as the incident in “Tough Love” (B5.19) when Glory removes Tara’s memory after Tara flees an argument she and Willow are having. Tara needs an affirmation not about the books but about the subtext or sexual implications of the plan. What she is actually asking is whether or not Willow understood her sexual innuendos back at the Magic Box. Willow, however, responds not with a direct answer but with another question: “Well, who wants to stay cooped up on a day like this?” Like Buffy with Giles, Willow avoids answering the questions posed to her. On the one hand, Willow’s response can be read as an acknowledgment that she does understand the original pretense—that is, Willow’s question acts to play along by continuing the pretense. However, whereas Tara’s question requires (*desires* even) an answer from Willow, Willow’s question is rhetorical and, therefore, precludes further response. Notably, Willow’s question also implies that they remain outdoors rather than in the bedroom, which could heighten Tara’s insecurities about their relationship. Rhetorical questions, as Kertzer explains, “impose consensus” and “forcefully exclude disagreement.”³⁸ Thus, in this rhetorical exchange, Willow is the one in control of both questions and answers. The rhetorical effect of these two questions mimics the communication problems Tara, at some level, already recognizes—those expressed immediately thereafter in her song to Willow.

The questions in Anya and Xander’s song “I’ll Never Tell” also work both to reveal and conceal relationship dynamics. As Williams notes, “The fact that both of them will ‘never tell’ is exactly the problem in their relationship.”³⁹ What remains to be determined, however, is the covert secret or unspoken truth that they “never tell” in the song. The lyrics reveal overt fears about aging and failure, but the main problem—the couple’s inability to communicate effectively—is revealed in the rhetorical structure of questioning. Even before the song begins, their communication

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strategy becomes evident in their first exchange: Xander asks, “You want some breakfast, baby?” Anya responds not with a simple “yes” or “no” but by asking, “You don’t have to get to work?” Likewise, when Xander asks, “So, waffles?” Anya responds, “Will you still make me waffles when we’re married?” On one level, Anya’s questions reveal concerns about Xander and their impending marriage. On a rhetorical level, her lack of direct response to Xander’s questions—the fact that she responds to both questions not with an answer but with another question—suggests that Anya is more interested in her own concerns than in giving Xander the responses he seeks. The same communication scenario is played out in the song itself. Xander asks, “Is she looking for a pot of gold?” and “Will our lives become too stressful / if I’m never that successful?” Anya asks, “Will I look good when I’ve gotten old?” He appears concerned about financial or career failure; she appears concerned about her beauty fading. However, Xander has enjoyed relative financial security and career success since early in season five, and Anya is already over 1,120 years old (having only recently begun to age as a human).⁴⁰ Thus, the fears implied in these questions seem less relevant than the acts of questioning themselves. That is, although Xander and Anya hear each other’s overt messages, neither of them hears the covert subtexts of the other, and neither attempts to answer the questions posed; instead they both pose additional questions. A more realistic fear may well be rooted in another unanswered question posed by Anya in “Flooded” (B6.4): “When are you going to grow up, Xander?” This is a rhetorical question that asserts a difference in maturity levels. Xander does not respond to the question; however, other episodes leading up to “Once More, With Feeling” reveal that he would rather attain “a limited edition Backstreet Boys lunchbox” (“Bargaining, Part 1,” B6.1) than “think about a down payment on a house” (“All the Way,” B6.6). Anya, on the other hand, wants to move quickly toward “new cars, house and babies” because, as she explains, “mortal life being so short, we gotta get in as much marital bliss as we can before we wither and die” (“All the Way,” B6.6). The song’s remaining questions are rapid, lyrical, and even humorous: “Am I crazy?” “Am I dreamin’?” “Am I marrying a demon?” The first two are rhetorical; the third is not: *Yes*, Xander, you might very well be marrying a demon. Anya, after all, will become a demon again thanks to the events of “Hell’s Bells” (B6.16). Arguably, what Anya is not admitting in this song (to others or herself) is that she would

prefer to be an independent immortal demon rather than the wife of a withering and immature human. This may be what Xander fears and what they both “will never tell.”

Anya’s questions from her other song, “Mrs.” (featured as a flashback in “Selfless,” B7.5), also covertly reveal Anya’s unspoken fears and potential demonic desires at the time of “Once More, With Feeling.” As opposed to the seemingly superficial questions sung in her duet with Xander, her individual song contains three potentially poignant questions: “But who am I?”; “What’s the point of loving?”; and “What’s the point of losing your heart?” This song reveals that Anya’s fears are not merely those overtly implied in “I’ll Never Tell” (such as “it’s all just temporary” or that she’ll become “worn and wrinkly”) but that she has lost her sense of self—one attained during her thousand-year history as a vengeance demon. The episode’s ambiguous title, “Selfless,” has two possible meanings: first, it could refer to her selfless offer of self-sacrifice at the end of the episode; alternatively, it could refer to Anya’s lack of a sense of her true self—one that is arguably gained by the end of “Selfless” but absent at the time of her song (that is, at the time of “Once More, With Feeling”). Though Anya repeatedly replies to her question “But who am I?” with different versions of “missus,” she does not sing about who she is as an individual detached from “Mr. Xander Harris.” (This is the same problem faced by Tara in regard to Willow.) The contrast between the name “Mr. Xander Harris,” which Xander “carries with pride,” and “Mrs. Anya Lame-Ass-Made-Up-Maiden-Name Harris” illustrates the main problem. At this time, Anya does not have a name that effectively reflects her identity. Notably, another “Selfless” flashback (this one to Anya’s original human life as a medieval Baltic woman named Aud) also involves naming. D’Hoffryn (the patron of vengeance demons) says to Aud, “I’m afraid you don’t see your true self. You are Anyanka.” Later, when Aud asks him, “Why do you keep calling me that?” and insists, “My name is Aud,” D’Hoffryn responds, “Perhaps, but Anyanka is who you are.” “Anyanka,” however, is a name that was imposed upon her, not one that she chose. (Even “Aud” is a name that, most likely, was given to her as a baby by someone else.) Though Anya presumably chose her own made-up name (Anya Christina Emmanuel Jenkins), and though “Mrs. Harris” is a name she is about to choose freely for herself, neither name reflects her true self or sense of identity. “Vengeance is what I am,” Anya tells Halfrek in the

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“Selfless” flashback to St. Petersburg 1905. As a former vengeance demon about to become Mrs. Xander Harris, Anya has no sense of power. This problem links directly back to the lyrics of “I’ll Never Tell”: “Vengeance was mine. / But I’m out of the biz. / The name I made I’ll trade for his.” “Vengeance” is the name she made for herself. A desire to regain her power—her name—as vengeance demon may be the unspoken truth that Anya will “never tell,” one revealed covertly in the question “But who am I?” Her answers to this question are not the ones she wants to hear. The other two questions (“What’s the point of loving?” and “What’s the point of losing your heart?”) elicit only superficial answers regarding sex (“the sweaty part”) and finances (“It makes financial sense as well”). Without a sense of self, without being able to answer her own question of identity, Anya cannot see the point of loving or of losing her heart.

Dawn also uses rhetorical questions that ask and assert one thing but structurally and contextually suggest something else. Notably, she waits until she is alone to ask, “Does anybody even notice? / Does anybody even care?” She sings these questions to her own reflection in the mirror. Her choice to pose rhetorical questions sabotages the possibility of response. In that sense, she is enabling the very thing she claims to fear: that no one *does* care about her. However, this fear is not logical given the context. Her sister gave up her life for her, and thereafter the entire Scooby gang has worked to look after her. Indeed, the Scoobies go so far as to have the Buffybot stand in for Buffy at school so that Dawn can remain at home rather than be shipped off to live with her father. Dawn must negate response through rhetorical questions because if she were actually to ask someone these questions, the answer would be *yes*. The concealed fear, the unspeakable fear, is something else entirely—something from which she distracts herself by focusing on the revealed fear. Arguably, Dawn fears that Buffy wants to die again. This fear is certainly not unfounded; indeed, in “Bargaining, Part 2” (B6.2), Dawn finds Buffy about to leap from Glory’s tower: “Don’t jump, Buffy!” Dawn pleads. “Don’t move! . . . Please! . . . We were up here together and then you went away. You don’t want to do that again.” Dawn witnesses this possibility yet again when Buffy confronts Sweet: “Deal’s this,” Buffy tells him. “I can’t kill you, you take me to Hellsville in her place.” Buffy thus offers to sacrifice herself for Dawn *again*. After she learns that Buffy had been in heaven, Dawn has even more reason to fear her sister will die again. Indeed, she says to Buffy

in “Dead Things” (B6.13), “You didn’t wanna come back. I know that. You were happier where you were. You wanna go away again.” In “Once More, With Feeling,” what Dawn does not acknowledge aloud is that *losing Buffy* is her fear—that the problem is not a *lack* of caring but *excessive* caring evident in Buffy’s self-sacrifice and, moreover, that perhaps she, Dawn, believes herself to be unworthy of such sacrifice.

Buffy’s self-sacrificial offer to go “to Hellsville in [Dawn’s] place” not only shows, once again, how much Buffy cares for her sister but simultaneously reveals how little she values her own life. Notably, Buffy’s first words to Sweet (in response to his comment “I love a good entrance”) comprise a life-denying rhetorical question: “How are you at death scenes?” Shortly thereafter, when Sweet asks, “What if I kill you?” Buffy responds, “Trust me. It won’t help.” Thus she continues to make jokes about the very thing for which she may well be longing. Just prior to this scene, in “Walk through the Fire,” Buffy asks, “Why can’t I feel?” Yet we know that she can feel, given her words to Spike at the end of “After Life” (B6.3): “Everything here is hard, and bright, and violent. Everything I feel, everything I touch—this is hell.” Again, the problem is not a lack of feeling but excessive negative feelings. Buffy’s reason for walking through the fire is also phrased as a question: “Where else can I turn?” On one level, this is a rhetorical question that asserts she has no choice other than to walk through the metaphorical fire toward her sister. On another, this is an information question, the answer to which is *away*—that is, in the other direction, away from her responsibilities as the slayer. But she cannot bring herself to speak this possibility—to *consciously* admit that she doesn’t want this life. By all appearances, walking through the fire toward Dawn is an affirmation of her life’s endeavor, but as we’ve just seen, the opposite is true. Her willingness to sacrifice herself, yet again, for Dawn and exchange her current hell for Sweet’s hell dimension is a further expression of her death wish.

Buffy’s question “Why can’t I feel?” from “Walk through the Fire” is followed by a series of unanswered rhetorical questions posed by Giles, Xander, and Tara. Giles asks, “Will this do a thing to change her? / Am I leaving Dawn in danger? / Is my slayer too far gone to care?” Xander asks, “What if Buffy can’t defeat it?” Tara asks, in an echo from an earlier song, “What can’t we face if we’re together?” Certainly, each of these questions makes an implied assertion. Indeed, these assertions suggest that Giles,

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Xander, and Tara are concerned, at some level, about other people: Giles's questions involve Buffy and Dawn; Xander's question involves Buffy; Tara's question involves the group (or, perhaps, only Willow). However, Giles's and Xander's questions are posed quickly in succession, and Tara's is interspersed with a statement from Buffy ("But why I froze, not one among them knows"); moreover, none of the questions is answered. Each question is rhetorical and, thereby, negates response or discussion. Thus, the rhetorical structure of the questions within the song suggests that each character is so preoccupied with his or her own concerns that none of them listens to the concerns of the others. (This is an expanded form of the communication problems exhibited in the questions asked by Xander and Anya in "I'll Never Tell.") In this sense, each question gestures toward the unspeakable truth that the literal monsters of Sunnydale are not the main problem. The problem is that the Scooby gang—known for its ability to work together—is at risk of falling apart; individual concerns are negatively affecting the group cohesion and communication. Is it any surprise that the final song emphasizes a question about the group (through both title and lyrics): "Where Do We Go From Here?" As Wilcox points out in regard to the group's lack of cohesiveness in the final song, the lyrics "are 'Understand we'll go hand in hand, but we'll walk alone in fear'—Not 'We'll walk alone in fear, but understand we'll go hand in hand'—and it hardly takes a rhetorical expert to note the difference in emphasis."⁴¹ The unspeakable truth may be that this impending breakdown is a current (albeit temporary) necessity.

With their rhyme and rhythm, with their lyrics and notes, the songs of "Once More, With Feeling" are rhetorically constructed illusions of truth. When Sweet sings, "Why'd you run away? Don't you like my style?" he instantly changes his suit color, thereby distracting the audience from another possible implication of this question. "Style" does not necessarily refer only to his sartorial aesthetic but arguably to rhetorical style—and the effects thereof on each singer. "I come from the imagination / and I'm here strictly by your invocation. / So what'd you say? / Why don't we dance a while?" Even under Sweet's influence, the characters cannot yet say what they cannot yet face. They can, however, dance themselves to death by refusing to recognize their unspoken truths. We know from Sweet's song that combusting is "the penalty when life is full of song." Notably, it is not the spoken admission of her revealed truth that stops Buffy from combusting; it's the unspoken acknowledgment of her secret

death wish. That is, Buffy reveals one secret when she admits aloud to everyone that she was “expelled from heaven”; however, this cannot be the truth that stops her frantic dance, given that the dance occurs *after* she admits she was in heaven. In other words, these songs are dangerous *not* because they reveal the truth; they are dangerous because they hide the truth behind their rhetorical construction. Buffy survives not because she reveals her truth in song but because Spike convinces her that she has to stop singing and go on living: “Life’s not a song. / Life isn’t bliss, / life is just this, / it’s living. . . . The pain that you feel, / you only can heal / by living.” Dawn then reminds her (in spoken words rather than song), “The hardest thing in this world is to live in it.” These words—Buffy’s own words to Dawn from “The Gift”—trigger Buffy’s recognition of her unspeakable truth: she has been courting death. In his own song, Spike asks Buffy, “Why won’t you let me rest in peace?” But the audience knows that he does not want her to leave him alone. He wants Buffy to respond to him, both physically and emotionally. His kiss with her—the manifestation of a desire for her that he does not admit aloud in his song or elsewhere in the episode—occurs only after he and Buffy leave the others (who continue singing themselves through a series of questions in “Where Do We Go From Here?”). Notably, Spike and Buffy must also leave the reprised versions of their own songs in midsentence in order to kiss. This particular manifestation of the unspoken truth that they physically desire each other is revealed only when their singing ends.⁴²

I have often wondered why Sweet says in his final reprise, “there’s not a one who can say this ended well”—after all, they’ve won *this* battle against *this* demon. But now I think the answer is in Sweet’s next lines: “All those secrets you’ve been concealing. / Say you’re happy now—once more, with feeling.” In their songs, the characters have been *concealing* secrets, not merely revealing them. *Say* you’re happy now (even though you’re still not) and repeat it, with feeling, in order to convince yourself of its truth. In other words, the songs create a facade of truth behind which other truths are concealed. The questions the characters ask throughout the episode allow them to approach these unspeakable truths; this, in turn, allows the audience to glimpse individual expressions of truth that will gradually be spoken throughout season six. (Buffy admits to Willow at the end of “Gone” [B6.11] that she would have welcomed death; Tara confronts Willow’s violation of her in “Tabula Rasa” [B6.8]; when

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Xander and Anya discuss their failed relationship in “Entropy” [B6.18], Xander says, “All I had to do was say something earlier”; Dawn discusses her feelings of “being alone” in “Older and Far Away” [B6.15]). “When does ‘the end’ appear? / When do the trumpets cheer?” the group asks in the final few lines of the final song. The questions must continue because, although unanswered here, they point the way toward answers that cannot yet but will eventually be heard and acknowledged. In a television show that “[plays] with the complexity of episodic closure that is never quite closure,” the lack of direct answers to questions is not only the point but a necessity.⁴³ The alternative would be for the questioning to stop and the answers never to be recognized. The Whedonverse has already provided us a vision of that scenario: In “Shiny Happy People” (A4.18), Fred, speaking to Angel, hinting at her concerns about Jasmine, asks, “But have you noticed how we all just kind of do what she says, don’t ask questions?” Angel responds, “Isn’t it a relief? Constant questioning. It’s finally over.” Well, we all know where *that* leads.

* * *

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Notes

1. Quotations from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* are cited by season and episode number.
2. J. M. Kertzer, “Rhetorical Questions: Consensus, Authority, Enigma,” *Language and Style: An International Journal* 20, no. 3 (1987): 242.
3. Elana Levine and Lisa Parks, eds., introduction to *Undead TV: Essays on Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2007), 4.
4. Micol Ostow, ed., “Behind the Scenes,” in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer: The Script Book “Once More, With Feeling”* (New York: Simon Pulse, 2002), 64.
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7. Rhonda Wilcox, *Why Buffy Matters: The Art of Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2005), 193.
8. Anthony J. Gilbert, "Shakespearean Self-Talk, the Gricean Maxims and the Unconscious," *English Studies* 76, no. 3 (1995): 221.
9. Gilbert, "Shakespearean Self-Talk," 222.
10. Gilbert, "Shakespearean Self-Talk," 222.
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14. Matthew Pateman, *The Aesthetics of Culture in Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2006), 180.
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16. Albright, "Breakaway," par. 11.
17. Ostow, "Behind the Scenes," 76.
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26. Gregory Stevenson, *Televised Morality: The Case of Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Lanham, Md.: Hamilton Books, 2003), 143.
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29. Jes Battis, *Blood Relations: Chosen Families in Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Angel* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2005), 108.
30. Lorna Jowett, *Sex and the Slayer: A Gender Studies Primer for the Buffy Fan* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 2005), 52.
31. Jowett, *Sex and the Slayer*, 53.

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32. As opposed to the sheet music lyrics, the script lyrics (of all the songs) contain line breaks with no punctuation; thus punctuation at the break between “how else can it be” and “anyone would notice me” is open to interpretation; moreover, the song is sung with a pause between the two phrases. The original shooting script is reproduced in Ostow, *The Script Book* (pages 1–56).

33. The scene with Tara and Willow spans pages 12–15 of the original shooting script (see Ostow, *The Script Book*).

34. Kertzer, “Rhetorical Questions,” 253.

35. Williams, “Threat to the Subject,” 2.

36. Jowett, *Sex and the Slayer*, 51.

37. Wilcox, *Why Buffy Matters*, 203.

38. Kertzer, “Rhetorical Questions,” 243.

39. Williams, “Threat to the Subject,” 5.

40. See “The Replacement” (B5.3) and “Doppelgangland” (B3.16).

41. Wilcox, *Why Buffy Matters*, 200.

42. Though Spike’s desire for Buffy is evident throughout season five, it is not discussed or revealed during season six until the kiss.

43. Rob Cover, “From Butler to Buffy: Notes toward a Strategy for Identity Analysis in Contemporary Television Narrative,” *Reconstruction: Studies in Contemporary Culture* 4, no. 2 (2004): par. 22, <http://reconstruction.eserver.org/042/cover.htm>.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

SINGING THEIR HEARTS OUT The Problem of Performance in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel*

Janet K. Halfyard



The narratives of film and television have a long history of representing acts of artistic performance, with professional performers playing other performers, both fictional and factual. These range from the “backstage musicals” popular in the 1930s and 1940s, such as *Singin’ in the Rain*, to biopics of classical composers and popular musicians, like *Amadeus* and *The Doors*, to television series such as *Fame*. More recently, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and its spin-off *Angel* have also regularly included musical and dramatic performances by the principal characters as a feature of the narrative, but unlike the usually musically adept or even virtuosic performances commonly found in film and television, characters in the Buffyverse frequently perform very badly.¹ This essay examines the singing and performing of the main characters outside of the musical episode “Once More, With Feeling” (B6.7) and draws some conclusions about the unusual position that performance occupies within the regular, nonmusically enchanted Buffyverse.²

The first examples of performing in the series occur toward the end of *Buffy*’s first season. “The Puppet Show” (B1.9) centers on the school talent show, in which four of the primary characters take part. Cordelia is seen singing “The Greatest Love of All,” which, of course, is “learning to love yourself,” an ironic yet revealing comment on the self-obsessed character of first-season Cordelia. She clearly believes herself to be quite

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talented, but in fact she sings out of tune and has an awkward stage presence, a marked contrast to her offstage sophistication.

In the same episode, Buffy, Willow, and Xander are forced into performing a dramatic scene extracted from the Greek tragedy *Oedipus*, and a tragic performance it is. After a display of stilted acting and badly remembered dialogue, Willow finally flees the stage in panic. Although the talent show ends with a victory over a demon stalking the cast, the notion of performance anxiety and poor performances is cemented within the series. The theme of performance is continued in the following episode, "Nightmares" (B1.10), in which Willow finds herself onstage, expected to sing the role of Madame Butterfly. The trauma of this experience reprises itself in the finale of season four, "Restless" (B4.22), where, in her first-slayer induced dream, Willow again finds herself about to go onstage in a production for which she has had no rehearsal and for which she does not know the words. The earlier episode is further referenced when Willow checks to make sure that the production they are about to do is not *Madame Butterfly*, as she has "a whole problem with opera."³

We must acknowledge, however, that art is not mirroring life, and that characters who cannot perform are rather evidently being played by people who can: Willow may be a hopeless actress and a terrible singer, but Alyson Hannigan is not. We hear very little of her singing in "Once More, With Feeling," but what we do hear is in tune and in time, and therefore competent at the very least; and she is clearly a gifted actress. Likewise, Cordelia sings dreadfully in *Buffy* season one, gives a terrible performance as Nora in Ibsen's *A Doll's House* in *Angel* season one, and sings "We Are the Champions" drunkenly with Wesley and Gunn in season two ("Redefinition," A2.11). Again, as with Willow / Alyson Hannigan, we know at one level that Cordelia is a fictional character who is not supposed to be able to perform well being played by a very able actress called Charisma Carpenter. We already know, from "The Puppet Show," that Xander and Buffy can act no better than Willow, although obviously Nicholas Brendon and Sarah Michelle Gellar can (and do) act very well.

It is clearly a deliberate script-writing decision that the Buffyverse should be populated by people who perform badly onstage, and it appears to be the stage itself and the formalized act of performing that are in some way problematic. Away from the stage, Buffy obviously fancies herself as a stand-up comedienne, practicing her slayage one-liners and

expressing disappointment when her vampire victims do not seem suitably impressed by her delivery; but this ability is restricted to the “real” world of slaying. Put her in the field, and she can deliver; put her on the stage and she cannot, something made quite explicit in “Wild at Heart” (B4.6), which opens with Buffy running away from the college campus, pursued by a vampire. Her flight is intentional, to get her away from public view, as she then explains as they fight:

Thanks for the relocate. I perform better without an audience. [She and the vampire fight.] You were thinking, what, a little helpless co-ed before bed? You know very well, you eat this late [she stakes him] you’re gonna get heartburn. Get it? Heartburn? [He turns to dust without responding.] That’s it? That’s all I get? One lame-ass vamp with no appreciation for my painstakingly thought-out puns. I don’t think the forces of darkness are even trying. I mean, you could make a little effort here, you know? Give me something to work with.⁴

There are several regular characters that do sing well. Lorne, Darla, and Lindsey all acquit themselves professionally at Caritas, the karaoke bar featured in *Angel*; Giles and Oz are both guitarists, although we never hear Oz sing as such.⁵ Initially, Giles’s singing is a solitary activity that is not revealed to us, but in season four we see him both performing in the local coffee bar and singing at home. Oz, of course, is a werewolf, and one might argue that competent music-making or performance is a mark of the outsider, of Otherness. Lorne and Darla are nonhumans, while Lindsey is a human working for the demons, his loyalties divided in such a way as to make him an outsider in all available camps; in *Buffy* season four, the two most obvious musicians are Oz and fellow werewolf Veruca, whose Otherness is quite explicit; and Giles’s Englishness, age, and status as a Watcher might also qualify him as an Other in the Buffyverse’s teenage California.

This idea of Otherness, however, does not stand up to the slightest scrutiny. Almost every principal character on the side of the “forces of good” in both *Buffy* and *Angel* can make a claim for Otherness: preternaturally gifted slayer; gay witch; former demon; werewolf; Englishman and/or vampire. Cordelia ends up part demon, Gunn is the only regular-cast black character in either series, and Fred is a physicist. Given the largely negative portrayal of scientists in the Buffyverse, as represented by encounters with praying mantis science teachers (B1.4), demon-infested

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computers (B1.8), and the Initiative (*Buffy* season four), being a physicist working for Angel Investigations arguably marks Fred as reformed Other in the same way as the former vengeance demon Anya and Angel himself. Meanwhile, Xander, a nonsupernatural, white, heterosexual human male, could probably use this exceptional non-Otherness as a claim in its own right. Otherness is clearly an important concept in the Buffyverse, but the process of Othering characters is less about making them unsympathetic or threatening, and more to do with requiring us to judge characters by what they do rather than by what they are: we cannot make assumptions about characters based on their intrinsic physical nature. Ultimately, in terms of Otherness and performance, while there are clearly those who are naturally good artistic performers, being a good performer is more of a thing one does than a thing one is. It is a question of confidence, self-awareness, and can be learned through training or experience, including being able to sing in tune. Given the writers' decisions to populate the Buffyverse with characters who variously can and cannot perform well, what are the rules and codes underlying who can sing in the Buffyverse?

Singing and Singers

Anyone can sing, even if they cannot sing beautifully. Many professional singers will describe themselves as singers rather than musicians, because a musician is usually understood to be an instrumentalist, and there are significant differences between singing and playing music.⁶ While many people can sing competently without having had any kind of training, it is much more unusual to find a proficient instrumentalist who has never had any formal or informal instruction in how to play.

Singers are also different from instrumental musicians in the ways their bodies are used in performance. Almost all instruments are positioned across the body (the torso or the face) when one plays them, but the singer stands before the audience with at most a microphone between them, and this does not mediate the performance space in the same way, because the "instrument" is not the microphone but the body itself. The true mechanism of the sound's production is completely concealed within the singer's body, and one of the results of this is that singers, unlike instrumentalists, are expected to look at the audience (as the audience in turn gazes back). This mutual gaze creates a type of immediacy and

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intimacy between singer and audience that sets the singer's performance apart: an instrumentalist who fixed the audience with an unwavering gaze would be frankly disconcerting.

Lastly, where a problem in sound production for an instrument might be blamed on some mechanical failure, the singer's voice is, in a very real sense, the singer. A concomitant problem is that to criticize a singer's voice is, in effect, to criticize the person, an aspect of singing personified in the figure of the pop diva or operatic prima donna as a hysterical and fundamentally insecure character. An instrument with a poor tone can be replaced: a larynx cannot. This is part of the paradox of the voice: it is inside the body, yet it is also the means by which one sends sounds out to communicate with the world. It is both internal and external, and as Jonathan Rée points out, the paradoxes do not end there. The voice can use language to communicate linguistic, abstract ideas, or can yell or laugh to communicate emotional ones:

Voices thus encode an intriguing human tension, even a contradiction: they are both expression and communication, both feeling and intellect, both body and mind, both nature and culture. The whole of us, it would seem, is included in the compass of the human voice.⁷

Singing is positioned very firmly within this set of oppositions. In most cases, there is an assumption that the singer is sincere, that we are indeed hearing the person, their self, their soul laid bare. In singing, we reveal ourselves: "It is as if your voice were as private and vulnerable as your defenseless naked body."⁸

However, a professional singer is not like an ordinary person when it comes to singing, but takes on a form of Otherness, adopting specialized strategies (disguises, even) to enhance the *appearance* that the soul is being laid bare. In addition, one of the greatest paradoxes of the act of singing is that in using the voice, that ultimate expression of the self, the singer is almost always also an actor (explicitly or implicitly), often singing first-person, present-tense narratives that may or may not represent the singer's own history, and using particular vocal tricks in order to convince us that the emotions and narrative expressed are real. As Simon Frith writes:

In popular cultural terms, good talkers are mistrusted as well as admired: people who have a "way with words"—the seducer, the salesman, the

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demagogue, the preacher—are people with power, and the power to use words is a power to deceive and manipulate. Sincerity may then be best indicated by an inability to speak (*as in soul vocal convention*) or through an aural contradiction between the glibness of the lyric and the uncertainty of the voice (*as in much male country music*).⁹ (Frith's emphasis)

Popular singers, therefore, negotiate a very slippery territory; in order to sound genuinely convincing, they must not always sound polished. The vocabulary of professional singing is full of subtle tricks that form a cultural code of emotional sincerity, perhaps most obviously seen in the way singers ranging from the late opera star Luciano Pavarotti to rock artist Alanis Morissette allow the voice to break, employing breath noises, catches, sobs, and glitches in the sung line and the vocal timbre that indicate the depth of their emotion. These are re-creations of the normally involuntary vocal sounds associated with physical and emotional stress: the very mechanisms employed to convince the audience of the singer's sincerity are arguably a form of deception.

With these aspects of singing in mind, the politics of singing in *Buffy* and *Angel* become much more transparent, and sincerity appears to be the key issue governing whether a character can be permitted to sing in tune or act well. Rather than the intentionally subtly flawed singing of the professional, here the sheer bad singing of the amateur (Frith's "inability" to speak or sing taken to its literal extreme) appears to be an indication of the extent to which we can trust characters to be who or what they appear: they are incapable of deceiving us with vocal trickery, regardless of the abilities of the actors who play them. Being onstage indicates an intention to perform and an intention, potentially, to pretend to be something one is not, which is therefore different from the motivations underlying "performances" in the field, such as Buffy's one-liners. Using this principle, examining the singing of particular characters or the use of singing in specific episodes reveals how ideas of sincerity (or lack of it) are articulated, and how this in turn informs our perceptions of the characters who sing.

Giles and Lindsey: Singer/Performers and Sincerity

There is an important distinction to be made with regard to the characters who are essentially (or at least potentially) on the side of good and yet

can sing to a high standard, specifically Giles and Lindsey. They have in common the fact that they are not simply singers, but guitarists as well.¹⁰ This serves to position them as much as instrumentalists as singers in the way they relate to the audience: the sound of their voices and the lyrics they sing still give the sense that they are speaking to us, but they tend not to look directly at the audience, instead looking either at their instruments and the action of their playing, or singing with their eyes closed. Instead of the mutual gaze and direct communication one might expect with a (good) singer, the dynamic between audience and performer is mediated and distanced by the presence of the instrument, which has replaced the audience as the performer's primary focus. The perception of sincerity lies more in the way that we are drawn in to the intimate process of watching these performers in communion with their instruments and their music, and would be overtly voyeuristic if they did not clearly invite our gaze. Moreover, Lindsey is the only character who does not sing karaoke when he performs in Caritas: in "Dead End" (A2.18) he brings his guitar along and sings a song apparently of his own composition (actually written by David Greenwalt), further enhancing the sense that what he sings is genuinely felt rather than simply the reiteration of someone else's thoughts and feelings.

Similarly, we discover in *Buffy* season four that Giles is a musician. Although hinted at in his comment that he has "to get a band together" during his teenage regression in "Band Candy" (B3.6), Giles's musicianship becomes a theme throughout this season. Having seen Giles's record collection in "The Harsh Light of Day" (B4.3), Oz defends his unexpected appearance in The Bronze in "Wild at Heart," asserting his right as someone with the correct cultural credentials to be admitted into their youth-and-music subculture: even if he is now a little old and irredeemably English, nonetheless "he was an animal in his day."¹¹

The two episodes in which we see Giles singing (as opposed to seeing him dreaming that he is singing, which occurs later) also take steps to mitigate the extent to which he is seen as a performer, and therefore potentially deceiving us. In "Where the Wild Things Are" (B4.18), he is discovered in the coffee bar, performing to an adult audience. The Scooby gang is shocked (and Xander is horrified) by this discovery. Indeed, Giles has kept this side of himself hidden from them, as if he is aware of the complex problem that performance represents. On the one hand, it is

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likely to reveal too much about him on an emotional level, making him vulnerable and undermining his status within the group as a figure of authority and unflappable English calm. On the other hand, it sets him apart from the Scoobies and turns him into a performer, as opposed to an everyday person. As discussed above, it is not being Other that creates good performers in the Buffyverse, but being a good performer can create a sense of Otherness, setting the performer apart from normative modes of behavior. Lindsey occupies very ambivalent moral territory throughout *Angel* seasons one and two: his abilities as a performer, revealed just as he is about to leave L.A., serve to enhance that ambivalence. Giles, aware at some level of the problems of sincerity (whether too much of it or too little) inherent in being a performer, strives to keep his performing hidden. The only other occasion we see him singing with his guitar is in the privacy of his own home, where he believes himself to be unobserved until he is disturbed by Spike (“The Yoko Factor” B4.20).

Xander’s horror at the sight of Giles’s singing is also worth examining. In many ways, these two—the only human, nonsupernatural, “un-enhanced” white men in the regular cast of *Buffy*—act as a pair. None of the Scoobies have effective or even visible father figures, and Giles acts as a surrogate father to all of them to some extent. For Xander, however, he is more clearly a role model and, Englishness aside, there are considerable similarities between them, not least the fact that they are both usually represented as being physically powerless—Buffy is the essentially undisputed source of agency until season six—but have a hidden and occasionally unleashed ability to act. Giles sometimes reassumes the ruthlessness of his younger self, known as “Ripper,” and Xander is able to access the knowledge from his own alternate self, the soldier he became in “Halloween” (B2.7).

Giles, while being a thoroughly convincing performer, has a distinctive but not conventionally beautiful voice, which fits in very well with his slightly Bob Dylan-esque performance image. The reluctantly revealed intimacy of his relationship with his guitar and the “rawness” of his voice (exploiting those very catches and glitches, the vocal instability that, in Frith’s reading, would partly account for why Dylan himself is heard as being sincere) both add weight to our perception of Giles’s sincerity “despite” the high standard of his performance.

Lorne, Darla, and Harmony: Three Brief Cases of Sincerity and Deception at Caritas

Of the remaining characters who sing well, the issue of sincerity operates differently in each case. Lorne can clearly sing, but there is no attempt on his part to pretend to soul-baring sincerity in his performance. Both his singing style and his choice of repertoire demonstrate that he is operating in the realms of camp, and camp and sincerity are mismatched partners at the best of times. As Susan Sontag has famously written of camp, “It is the farthest extension, in sensibility, of the metaphor of life as theater.” This is the essence of Lorne’s life, including his theatrical clothing, setting, and demeanor.¹² Lorne’s version of camp is also manifest as the affectionate parodying of the sincere, taking the vocabulary of (sincere) bad taste and celebrating and exaggerating it knowingly, self-consciously, and with an unmistakable element of irony. Lorne sings for the sheer joy of the physical excess his repertoire offers him, rather than from a need to bare his soul to others. It is, however, extraordinarily revealing that it is through the singing of other individuals that he is able to see the souls and therefore read the futures of his clientele. As Rée has written, in philosophy “the idea of the soul is just a furtive and inhibited metaphor for . . . vocality.”¹³ The literal application of this metaphor in the character of Lorne as a receptor of vocality/insight into the soul points to the voice as a direct channel to the singer’s inner self, immediate, intimate, and revealing.

Darla’s singing at Caritas differs significantly from Lorne’s. With his notable exception, the moment a well-established character starts to sing in tune, we should probably be suspicious, as when the demonically enhanced Jonathan suddenly becomes a polished crooner in “Superstar” (B4.17). Darla’s stylish performance of Arlen and Koehler’s “Ill Wind” in “The Trial” (A2.9) is a textbook example of Frith’s singer using vocal tricks to convince us of her sincerity. These are most pronounced during the bridge section of the song:

You’re only misleadin’ the sunshine I’m needin’—
Ain’t that a shame?
It’s so hard to keep up with troubles that creep up
From out of nowhere, when love’s to blame.¹⁴

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Although audiences may hear her performance as being straightforward, professional-standard singing, it is in fact full of timbral alterations and pitch changes that deviate from the written melodic line. There is use of a particularly breathy tone on “only” in line one, “up” at the end of line three, and the “where” of “nowhere” in the final line. There is instability in the sung notes, including sliding down in pitch at the end of “shame,” and various kinds of ornamentation, moving away from the note and back again on “needin’,” “shame,” and “blame.” Similarly, at the start of the third line, she leaves the pitch of “It’s” early, slipping down a semitone halfway through the word, onto the pitch belonging to the following word, “so.” There are a large number of creaks—the introduction of noise into the sung note—something that in speech might be heard as fatigue, misery, or illness, all physical or emotional states of vulnerability. These are particularly noticeable on the line “It’s so hard to keep up with troubles that creep up,” where only the breathy “up” is entirely free of creak.

All of these flaws, these apparent failings in the voice, are designed to impress us with her sincerity, a code that declares “Look how hard it is for me to sing about this.” But we should not be fooled. That Darla is in deep emotional pain at this point, knowing that she is terminally ill, is not in dispute; but the way that professional-standard singing is coded in the Buffyverse means that we simply cannot trust her. Her singing signals that her apparent conversion to Angel’s point of view is ultimately just an expedient act of desperation.

In contrast to Darla’s “good” singing, the extent to which Angel is prepared to put himself (and everyone else) through the horror and humiliation of his singing reaffirms the selflessness of his character. (And we should probably remember that Angel and Wesley cannot only not sing—they can’t dance either, as they revealed at Cordelia’s party in “She” [A1.13].) Harmony is potentially an anomaly, a self-proclaimed evil vampire who nonetheless sings “The Way We Were” appallingly at Caritas in “Dis-harmony” (A2.17); but sincerity—not evil—is the governing factor, and Harmony frankly doesn’t have the intelligence to be insincere. She is exactly what she appears to be, and we know we cannot trust her; but we also know that she is virtually devoid of guile, and at many levels she is impossible to dislike—all facets of her character that are exploited fully in the final season of *Angel*. As a result, she has to be allowed to sing out of tune, not unlike the early, unreconstructed Cordelia, Harmony’s onetime best friend.

Cordelia: Performance and Sincerity, Performance vs. Sincerity

Cordelia is perhaps the most interesting character in relation to singing, performance, and issues of sincerity. Like Buffy, she performs badly on stage but does manage to pull off a believable acting performance in the field when lives are in danger: in “Eternity” (A1.17) she is confronted by a drug-induced temporarily evil Angel and delivers (by her own estimation) an Oscar-winning performance, fooling him into believing that she is armed with holy water. In retrospect, the fact that she sang badly in *Buffy* season one might well have been an early clue that Cordelia will not remain the vain and selfish creature she initially appears to be. The potential for altruism is an aspect of her personality that appears to be hidden from everyone, including herself, because like Harmony in “Disharmony,” Cordelia seems unaware that her singing is bad. All the other forces-of-good characters tend to be extremely aware when they are performing badly, but the rehabilitation of Cordelia’s character goes hand in hand with her growing awareness that she is not cut out for the performing life. In *Angel* season one, she is still seemingly unaware of how bad she is in Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House* and still determined to pursue her acting career; but the gift of her visions is a significant factor in changing her ambitions. We see this first in the season-one finale, when she becomes aware of the sheer amount of suffering in the world, an awakening that almost destroys her sanity. Then, in *Angel* seasons two and three, Cordelia’s development as a character is played out as a confrontation between Cordelia the performer and Cordelia the seer.

Cordelia’s character is complex: she is far from stupid, as her multiple acceptances by good colleges demonstrates in *Buffy* season three; and she is not as shallow as she almost willfully appears—her feelings for Xander and her unhappiness over his infidelity are entirely genuine, compared to Harmony’s vacuous inability to perceive Spike’s true feelings for her, let alone have any deeper feelings for him beyond her own sense of the status he gives her (as seen, for example, in “The Harsh Light of Day,” [B4.3]). Cordelia has clearly been spoiled in material terms, but there are considerable hints that she has been neglected emotionally and more or less abandoned by her family after her parents’ problems with the IRS. There are also indications that she suffers from low self-esteem, such as

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her constant battle to maintain her popularity at school at the expense of more meaningful relationships in *Buffy* season one, and her attempt to escape from reality through acting, leading to her willingness to submit to what she clearly believes to be Russell Winter's casting couch in the pilot episode of *Angel*.

However, season two of *Angel* uses Cordelia's dilemma—her desires to both serve the greater good and pursue her own fame and fortune—to demonstrate her development and the radical changes she undergoes. The very first episode of season two begins with a brief introduction to Lorne that locates the karaoke bar at the center of the overall season narrative. The second scene of the introductory teaser then takes us to Cordelia at an actors' workshop, apparently doing very well (despite the fact that she gets carried away and physically slaps her coactor). However, in the midst of receiving praise from her director, she is called away by her other job working for Angel Investigations. As she leaves, the director is still trying to direct: Cordelia exits to the line "Focus on how conflicted you . . ." This comment very pointedly highlights the conflict between her two lives and, as with Caritas, places it in the foreground in the opening minutes of the first episode as a theme that will run through the entire season.

The final episode of season two ("There's No Place Like Plrtz Glrb," A2.21) begins with a "previously on *Angel*" segment, the first clip of which comes from "Belonging" (A2.19), the last occasion on which we saw Cordelia in her role as performer, being resoundingly humiliated during the recording of a commercial. She had been excited about making the commercial, excited by the idea that her acting career might be taking off, but as much as anything excited by the perceived glamour of the situation and being the center of attention: in other words, by all the aspects of the performing life that appeal most strongly to the early Cordelia's desire for attention and validation. The use of this clip as part of the teaser for the season-two finale is, in terms of establishing the sequence of events, completely irrelevant; but in terms of Cordelia's development, it is essential that we should be reminded of Cordelia as the performer who craves the love of an adoring audience. When she is sucked through the vortex into Pylea, her dreams of being a star are suddenly realized when she is made princess and ruler, lavished with luxury and attention. In effect, the dreams of Cordelia the performer have come true: she can play at being

the adored star for as long as she wants, complete with the obligatory gorgeous costar boyfriend, Groo.

However, she learns that Groo's role in the arrangement is to take her visions away from her, and here the conflict between her two roles is brought into sharp relief. To retain her visions, she must give up the starring role she has landed, but the choice would appear to be a surprisingly easy one to make:

Cordelia: You can't take my visions. I need them. I use them to help my friends fight evil back home. . . . I can't give up my visions—I like them. OK, so I don't like the searing pain and agony that is steadily getting worse . . . but I'm not ready to give them up either . . . they're a part of who I am now. They're an honor.¹⁵

Her altruistic and humble reasons for wanting to keep her visions are as important as the fact that she is willing to give up her starring role. Performance, and its analogue as a Pylean princess, is again positioned as a form of (self-)deception, a self-indulgent escapism in contrast to the painful, grimly real but honorable nature of Cordelia's role as seer.

In *Angel* season three, the conflict between performance and Cordelia's growing sense of moral responsibility is again made explicit. The visions are threatening to kill her, and in "Birthday" (A3.11) she reaches the end of her ability to survive them; but the Powers That Be offer her a chance to live by rewriting history. Not unlike her chance at being the princess in Pylea, here she is offered the acting career of her dreams, a life as a nationally loved television star; but it seems that the changes that have been made to her character by the visions in the original version of history cannot be erased. She may have been taken to a reality where none of the events of seasons one or two have occurred, but her character's development has remained intact. When she is confronted with the terrible things that have happened to Angel and Wesley in this version of reality, she is again forced into a moral choice and again does not hesitate: she asks to be made part demon, takes back her visions, and rejects the life she was offered as a successful performer.

This conflict between Cordelia's two possible lives again suggests that performance and sincerity are mutually opposed propositions in the Buffyverse. By rejecting performance in favor of the visions, Cordelia

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chooses service, altruism, and engagement with the real, difficult world of the Buffyverse over the potential deceptions and glamour of performing. Rejecting performance, she becomes more credible as an agent for the Powers That Be and more sincerely loveable for herself. In fact, by rejecting performance and its illusions, she becomes much more like Buffy herself. Both are “chosen ones,” chosen by mystical forces and given a gift with which to serve the world; both have to give up the lives they expected to lead in order to do this; both have to give up some of their literal humanity in order to serve humankind better. Cordelia becomes part demon, while Buffy (involuntarily) comes back from heaven in order to keep saving the world, with her humanness altered such that she is no longer protected from Spike by his chip. Both Cordelia and Buffy are also offered an alternative reality that might well be easier to live in than the one they are currently in, Cordelia in “Birthday” in *Angel* season three (A3.11), and Buffy in “Normal Again” in *Buffy* season six (B6.17), running parallel to this season of *Angel*.

In *Angel* season four, we lose Cordelia. For the second time, a major character was written out of the series in a way that left viewers in denial—surely she, surely Doyle, would return: this could not be the end. But to all intents and purposes, it was; and in retrospect, we can see that Cordelia’s journey is framed by her two renditions of the same song: shortly before she is possessed by evil, she sings the opening line of “The Greatest Love of All” as badly as ever, for Lorne to read her. By recalling the song, as in the following episode where all the characters revert to the age of seventeen (“Spin the Bottle,” A4.6), we are invited to remember her as she was in *Buffy* season one and to marvel at the changes in her, the distance that her character has traveled, making it all the more tragic when we lose her soon after.

At the end of season four, Cordelia’s position is left in considerable doubt, and all her character’s achievements appear entirely undermined. Her assumption into a higher dimension appears to have been a fraud, and her return leaves her first possessed by evil and then consigned to a coma. However, her final appearance in episode 100, “You’re Welcome” (A5.12), is a final vindication of the true Cordelia, who returns one last time to save Angel and put him back on the right track. In her last appearance, the two sides of Cordelia, as performer and as servant of the Powers That Be, are finally united, for at the end of episode we discover

that Cordelia has died and that throughout this appearance she has been performing, pretending to be alive and back with the team, when in fact she is already gone. Her last performance, then, transcends the problems associated with performance and its illusions, for this performance was an act of altruism and of farewell, a performance the intent of which was to protect, to save, and to serve rather than to pursue any of the less noble impulses by which Cordelia was once driven.

Conclusion

It is evident that singing and performance have a very distinct role in both *Buffy* and *Angel*, and the positioning of singing serves to reinforce the credibility of the Buffyverse. The very nature of the voice and the extent to which it reveals us and renders us vulnerable to scrutiny is exploited in both series to reveal an apparent direct inverse correlation between good singing and sincerity, while other forms of performance, as explored through Giles and Cordelia, involve similar issues. It is, obviously, not without irony that the act of performance is problematized in order to explore ideas of sincerity in a television series that therefore relies on performances by its actors to communicate those ideas.

The problem with performance in the Buffyverse largely lies in its tendency to encourage vanity and self-seeking behavior. Giles is safe from this tendency, as he clearly does not want to be famous. Perhaps Ripper once did, but Giles keeps his performing private and personal and does not allow it to distract him from his responsibilities. Cordelia's personal odyssey sees her becoming arguably the most comprehensively transformed character of either series, overcoming the seductive deceptions of performance and discovering the rewards of taking up her own responsibilities.

To revisit one of the ideas at the beginning of this discussion, while good singing cannot be convincingly argued as an indication of Otherness, singing of a less than professional standard (be it genuinely dreadful or normally adequate) is a consistent indication that a character is fundamentally just like us: not perfect, sometimes in the wrong, but essentially sincere. This in turn reveals that the Buffyverse challenges the usefulness and the very validity of the idea of Otherness, simply because everyone associated with both the Scooby gang and Angel Investigations is arguably some form of Other. It augments the category of Otherness with that

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of sincerity, and whether a character is sincere or not becomes far more important in the personal relationships and larger-scale dynamics of the narrative than whether someone is (yet another) Other.

* * *

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Notes

1. In film narratives, it would be more usual to find the more unsympathetic or purely comic characters performing badly, such as the character of Lina Lamont in *Singin' in the Rain*.

2. This discussion refers only to instances of singing by principal and regular characters. There are examples of singing from single-episode characters in *Angel*, but there is no overall predictability as to whether these characters will sing well or not.

3. “Restless.” *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Season 4). DVD. Dir. Joss Whedon. Twentieth Century Fox, 2000.

4. “Wild at Heart.” *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Season 4). DVD. Dir. Joss Whedon. Twentieth Century Fox, 2000.

5. We see him singing backing vocals with his band Dingoes Ate My Baby but never explicitly hear his voice.

6. This observation is largely based on my own experience as a professional singer and on conversations with my students at Birmingham Conservatoire.

7. Jonathan Rée, *I See a Voice: Language, Deafness and the Senses—a Philosophical History* (London: HarperCollins, 1999), 16.

8. Rée, *I See a Voice*, 1.

9. Simon Frith, *Performing Rites: Evaluating Popular Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 168.

10. It is worth noting that they are both also men. The implications of a gendered positioning of singers as predominantly female against instrumentalists as predominantly male in both popular film and television is another subject I am

currently investigating. Both of the principal male characters in the Buffyverse who sing but do not play have ambivalently gendered positions, Lorne as a camp demon and Angel with the musical gender-reversal that I discussed in an earlier essay (Halfyard, “Love, Death, Curses and Reverses.” 2010).

11. “Wild at Heart.” *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Season 4). DVD. Dir. Joss Whedon. Twentieth Century Fox Television, 2000.

12. Susan Sontag, “Notes on ‘Camp,’” in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York: Picador, 2001), 280.

13. Rée, *I See a Voice*, 3.

14. Harold Arlen and Ted Koehler, “Ill Wind (You’re Blowin’ Me No Good),” 1934.

15. “There’s No Place Like Plrtz Glr.” *Angel* (Season 2). DVD. Dir. David Greenwalt. Twentieth Century Fox, 2001.

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CHAPTER EIGHT

ANGEL'S NARRATIVE SCORE

Matthew Mills



In her 2005 monograph *Why Buffy Matters: The Art of Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Rhonda Wilcox makes an eloquent case for evaluating *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* as a work of art as worthy of study as works by Dickens and Shakespeare.¹ In so doing, she also argues compellingly for a reconsideration of the general academic prejudice against the study of television, which has until recently also hampered the emerging field of film studies. If the study of music in film has primarily been restricted to the practices of such “golden age” composers as Erich Wolfgang Korngold, Max Steiner, and Alfred Newman, television has no comparable heritage for scholars to fall back on in order to claim academic validity or worth. Ironically, however, television is *the* defining media technology of our time, and any attempt to understand the roles and functions of music in today’s world without considering this omnipresent and highly influential cultural force is rather like writing a history of the twentieth century without using the word “war.” To be sure, not all television is great art, and study of this medium by its nature presents quite distinct problems. That drama series are divided into discrete units disseminated at regular intervals, which are often separated by large spans of time, and that they are sometimes ongoing and therefore incomplete, can inhibit a comprehensive analysis of character and plot, or of long-range structural procedures, in that such discussion might provide a summary of the situation so far, but a far from conclusive one. In contrast, however, the audience’s increasing reliance on



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new technologies such as on-demand television, Internet downloads, and the availability of entire seasons or shows on DVD, means that producers and scholars of television alike need no longer presuppose the audience's viewing habits, as it is possible to watch entire seasons in one sitting and, significantly, to skip forward and backward through a show, as readers might choose to pick up a book from the previous chapter to refresh their memories of plot and characters, or simply reread the most enjoyable or significant passages. The audience's experience of the televisual narrative, then, is not as linear as might once have been assumed.

The second, perhaps more fundamental, problem is that television is generally a product of group creative endeavor; the auteur-centric approach that, at least until recently, has been used to study film (most convincingly applied, not coincidentally, to the works of Hollywood's golden age, such as the Alfred Hitchcock–Bernard Herrmann collaborations) does not in general work for television. (This is also true for the more recent trend of group creativity in cinema, which often relies upon, for example, special effects outsourced to specialist companies such as Industrial Light and Magic.²) Wilcox's proposed solution to this problem is to regard a television series as an architectural historian would regard, say, a cathedral—the work of a collective body guided and shaped by one artistic vision. This solution is particularly apt for *Buffy* and *Angel*, whose creative team evolved a way of working in which individual talents were allowed to shine in their respective specialties while nonetheless serving Joss Whedon's principal creative policy, which might effectively be summarized as “plot first and foremost.” Similarly, while the underscore was also a group creative effort, overall it might also be said to be of the Christophe Beck “school,” for there is a musical approach common to those episodes scored by Beck and those scored by Robert J. Kral, Thomas Wanker, Robert Duncan, or Douglas Romaine; indeed, themes originally written by one composer are often used in scores credited to another.

The aim of this chapter is to show that *Angel*, like *Buffy*, represents the best possible practice in television serial drama, and as such shows us how television music can both heighten the viewer's experience and also add richness to a medium that is too often and too easily regarded as the cheapest of entertainment commodities.

A Narratological Excursion

Much of this discussion will involve a consideration of narrative. I view the music “in” *Angel* as an important, indeed integral, textual component, almost to the extent that it acts as a narrative voice, as a commentary rather than an accompaniment. While narratology has influenced the study of film music and opera, there are several difficulties both of terminology and of the nature of television as an object of study. For instance, is the basic narrative mode of television mimetic or diegetic?³ That is to say, does television drama aim to create the impression that we are seeing and hearing things for ourselves, as they happen? Put simply, does it aspire to a perceived realism? Or does television assume a more “diegetic” level of narrativity of which the audience is aware, and which is taken for granted? Although it is perhaps an oversimplification to describe the mimesis/diegesis divide as the difference between “showing” and “telling,” owing to the obvious differences between the narrative forms employed in literature and in television (and, indeed, film), it would appear that television’s default narrative mode is mimetic. However, the condensing, summarizing nature of the diegetic mode is frequently taken for granted. As Karen Sayer observes, for example, of the *Buffy* episode “The Body” (B5.16):

Normally, though we opt not to realize this, we never see a character travel down a complete corridor; the sets/spaces are usually sliced to pieces/cut up, even when someone is running. This time, however, we see the characters walk, the ordinariness of their walking simply feels odd compared to the way in which the show is usually produced. Their walking, the show taking time, has the effect of expanding the spaces that the characters inhabit, and of making their actions, their feelings, quite mundane.⁴

This technique of “slicing” journeys, of showing a character walking through a garden gate, for instance, then immediately knocking at the front door, is common television practice, as is the “location shot”—usually a still of the exterior of a particular location, shown briefly before an interior shot or scene in order to situate that scene for the viewer. So although summarizing, in effect providing in an unrealistic way the visual clues necessary for the audience to follow what is happening and where, this diegetic mode is the televisual norm, and when the editing process

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becomes absolutely mimetic, as it does in the “The Body,” the effect is alienating. That there is no music in this episode, and therefore nothing else to occupy the viewer’s attention during these lengthened journeys, only heightens this effect. So, while television drama might aim to depict “reality” as it happens (mimesis), this depiction is nonetheless subject to certain necessary time-saving narrative conventions (diegesis) that are taken for granted as an aspect of that mimetic depiction.

Part of the terminological problem stems from the tendency in film music studies to refer to diegetic/non-diegetic music as that which comes from within and without the drama respectively. Although the time has now passed when the very presence of music in a soundtrack was believed to belie a “realist(ic)” depiction, the habitual labeling of the televisual/cinematic action as diegesis makes a consideration of potentially mimetic narrative, and mimetic music, in these media more difficult and prevents a true appreciation of the sliding between mimetic and diegetic modes that is as essential to television drama as it is to written storytelling. As I explore below, music is so mnemonically efficient that a single musical phrase can recall more, and more quickly, than any flashback or dialogue, since it can do so in parallel with different images and words. This simultaneity can also create what James Buhler has called a “dialectic tension,” a friction between the images and dialogue and the musical underscore, from which a different meaning can be inferred than would be possible from either aspect of the medium alone.⁵ I would argue, contrary to common practice, that a mnemonic use of this kind could well be labeled “diegetic,” since this serves the summarizing and/or condensing purpose of the diegetic mode, regardless of whether or not the music comes from a source within the action. Likewise, much music traditionally called non-diegetic, because it has no perceptible source in the action, actually serves to reinforce a sense of time or place—the auditory equivalent of a location shot—and thus supports the depiction of reality, albeit necessarily televisually conventionalized, which might better be described as mimetic. In short, my objection is that the application of narratological terms based on music’s origin in relation to the drama limits a more nuanced use of them in describing how music contributes to the construction of a narrative.⁶

The narratological concern with focalization is also significant for our purposes. In literature, the difference between “external” and “internal”

focalization—being told only those things that are observable, such as actions and words, or those things that are not observable, such as feelings and ideas—has rarely come into play. The assumption has been that music is a signifier of emotion and is therefore the cinematic means of internal focalization, “expressing,” or at least externalizing, the characters’ feelings. The question of from whose perspective a narrative is told has usually been formulated in the study of film underscores as “whose” music is heard; “control” of the underscore has focalized its context and associated its expressive means with the emotions or experiences of a particular character. While Claudia Gorbman points out that the presence of music serves to “signify emotion,” I have always found Gorbman’s expression of this function strange, because surely most characters feel *something* throughout the narrative, irrespective of the musical score. The music cannot therefore simply signify that emotions are being experienced, but rather suggest that one particular emotion is being felt with a particular intensity by a character or group of characters—and the music and its associated images must therefore indicate whose emotional state is of prime importance at any particular juncture, and as such prioritize/focalize this character’s or these characters’ feelings at that point. K. J. Donnelly expands upon this by acknowledging the music’s reciprocity, which encourages or prompts an emotional response from the viewer, “authorizing their response.”⁷ On the other hand, in “The Body” (B5.16), the *absence* of music adds to the heightened, alienating sense of realism, which leads to a more profoundly felt response than in many of the episodes that are scored.⁸

Television/Film—Music in *Angel*

The use of music in *Angel* is exceptional. It stands in contrast to many shows that inhabit the category “quality television.” Both *Buffy* and *Angel* use original underscore, eschewing the cheaper and easier alternative of buying library music as needed. Although much of the underscore is synthesized, *Buffy* composer Christophe Beck established the procedure of engaging live musicians for important lines in significant cues. With only a few exceptions, the underscore is orchestral, employing the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century styles common to most film scoring—for instance, sweeping, Romantic melodies accompanying love scenes, or dissonant, modernist gestures suggesting the threat of violence.

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This in itself enhances the “cinematic” feel of the show that has been observed by many commentators.⁹

Although music plays an exceptional role in *Angel*, this is not to say that musical procedures are deployed in ways entirely different from those in other drama shows. While *Angel* does not avoid conventional musical strategies altogether, however, they are often put to greater narrative purpose than is usually the case. So, what are the conventions of television music? To what purposes is music deployed in television drama?

Jeremy Butler identifies four functions of the television soundtrack, of which music is a part: to capture attention, to maintain flow, to maintain continuity within scenes, and to manipulate the viewer’s understanding.¹⁰ These correlate roughly to the functions of music in film, as formulated by Gorbman, namely: “invisibility,” that its means of production are not visible to the characters or the audience; “inaudibility,” that it is not intended to be heard consciously; “signifier of emotion,” that its presence indicates an emotional state, sets a mood, or acts as a “signifier of emotion itself”; “referential/connotative cueing,” that it can indicate a point of view, establish a setting, or illustrate events in the narrative; “continuity,” that it can fill transitions between shots or scenes; and “unity,” that through repetition music can enhance the coherence of the narrative.¹¹ Donnelly, whose study stands out among others that have recently appeared in that it considers television and film in tandem rather than focusing on the latter at the expense of the former, refines these definitions by identifying the following purposes served by music in television: it “recurrently adds authority and provides an almost tangible sense of quality”; it ensures that “certain moments are emphasised, noted as significant, monumentalised and aestheticised.” He also points out that “certain music can attract the listener (and potential viewer) by providing an ident-branding,” and that “music can be an attraction in itself.” In this light, the music in *Angel* functions entirely in keeping with the tradition of music in television drama. It not only speaks for the quality of the show, but indeed augments that quality. However, Donnelly also observes that “the vast majority of music for television drama aims less at emotional effect than in film music.”¹² In this respect, *Angel*’s underscore is unquestionably cinematic rather than televisual. While it appears at significant moments, and does indeed enhance their aesthetic appeal, it also consciously aims to enhance the viewer’s emotional engagement with the subject matter. If we con-

sider the number of key moments in the series that happen almost or entirely without dialogue, and are expressed primarily through the emotive underscore—Cordelia’s ascension, Angel and Cordelia’s lovemaking, Doyle’s self-sacrifice, Buffy and Angel’s sun-drenched kiss, most of the fight sequences—we can see that the musical characteristics employed in each case aim to color our understanding of these moments and direct our response to them.

Reused Material: Musical Blocks

Donnelly describes sections of underscore that are reused in serial drama as “musical blocks.”¹³ *Angel* makes use of several “generic” blocks to accompany particular recurring events within the narrative. For instance, there is a comical pizzicato string trope that emphasizes humorous events or situations (and also “assents to” the audience’s amusement), such as the police officers’ overly emotional behavior in “Sense and Sensitivity” (A1.6), Angel’s hungrily raiding the refrigerator in “I Will Remember You” (A1.6), or Angel’s jealousy of Groo in “Couplet” (A3.14). Recalling Christophe Beck’s celebrated underscore for “The Zeppo” (B3.13), this slightly bizarre music serves to highlight the show’s less grisly happenings. Likewise, many of the Beast’s initial appearances in season four are announced by a five-note motif (see example 8.1). Through this procedure, the score serves a purpose roughly equivalent to what Philip Tagg calls the “reveille function,” whose purpose is to alert the viewer to, for instance, the start of a program or the end of a commercial break.¹⁴ Again, however, through repeated association, certain of these blocks signify more specifically, and thereby potentially serve a narrative purpose too.

For instance, there is “vision” music when Cordy has a vision: in “Judgment” (A2.1), while the gang cannot differentiate between Cordy anticipating a sneeze and an impending vision, this vision cue—a fairly brief snatch of almost-noise—warns the audience of the important, and cryptic, event about to take place. In “Birthday” (A3.11), the score alerts



Example 8.1. *Angel*: the “Beast” motif

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the viewer that Cordy wants to hand over baby Connor because of an impending vision, not just to open her birthday gifts, before the Angel Investigations team realizes what is happening. In this instance, the cue's duration is slightly extended (primarily for the pragmatic reason that handing over a baby takes time). On the other hand, in "Double or Nothing" (A3.18), the absence of the vision cue when Cordy tells Gunn she is having a "vision" of him and Fred taking the following day off confirms for the audience that this "vision" originates from Cordelia's imagination, not from the Powers That Be.¹⁵

This procedure does not, however, qualify as leitmotif as I use the term below, because the association, once established, is maintained fairly unchanged as a signifier of one thing, rather than functioning as implied commentary. This is the kind of musical event that regular viewers will "interiorize," to use Donnelly's term.¹⁶ Whether the material is developed musically or not, the dramatic context is unchanged.

Reused Material: Leitmotif

The most exceptional quality of the underscore in *Buffy* and *Angel* is the sense that it contributes to the narrative, that it does more than merely accompany the action. This goes against the common practice assumed in television, as described by Donnelly, that "while music in television programmes follows similar processes to film music, by and large it is far less sensitive or subtle."¹⁷

The principal musical technique employed to create this narrativity is leitmotif. While this term has crept into other fields of scholarship, with validity, the term is used here in its musical sense, as set forth by Arnold Whittall:

a theme, or other coherent musical idea, clearly defined so as to retain its identity if modified on subsequent appearances, whose purpose is to represent or symbolize a person, object, place, idea, state of mind, supernatural force or any other ingredient in a dramatic work. A leitmotif may be musically unaltered on its return, or altered in rhythm, intervallic structure, harmony, orchestration or accompaniment, and may also be combined with other leitmotifs in order to suggest a new dramatic situation.¹⁸

Although the leitmotif's polyvalency, to use Whittall's word, has often been problematic, and the term itself is not without ambiguities, which are due largely to widespread misuse, it is my contention that the exploitation of certain recurring musical units in *Angel* does qualify for this description. It is, however, sometimes unclear exactly to what object a leitmotif is "supposed" to pertain, and it is also problematic that these objects refer outward from themselves, inasmuch as they exemplify certain themes and embody particular qualities, and so assume a wider narrative significance, which each recurrence augments.

Eisler and Adorno's objection that the brevity of the leitmotif was related to the vast scale of Wagnerian music drama, whereas the cinema requires shorter, self-contained musical forms, and the limited dimensions of a feature film do not allow adequate opportunity for leitmotivic development, is not applicable to a television series. Although each episode may not extend to an hour's viewing, an entire season is more than fourteen hours in length and so allows ample opportunity to develop a leitmotivic nexus. Furthermore, as there is an urgent need for narrative economy within each episode, recurring music, owing to its mnemonic efficacy, can quickly summarize images and ideas that might consume a great deal of screen time to recall in other ways. Adorno and Eisler also objected that leitmotif served to endow events and objects with a metaphysical significance, but film seeks to depict reality.¹⁹ This is a spurious claim because, as discussed already, the "mimetic" presentation of reality is subject to conventions to which viewers are habituated, and while those conventions may be taken for granted, they nonetheless present a stylized version understood as, or taken for, reality, rather than its literal representation. And, of course, while a series like *Angel* or *Buffy* might seek to depict the fantastic in a more or less credible and plausible way, and while we as viewers might happily suspend our disbelief in order to afford ourselves the luxury of enjoyment, we do not ultimately believe what we see. The mythic quality lent by leitmotivic techniques in the underscore therefore serves exactly the right purpose.²⁰ Adorno and Eisler's complaint that leitmotif facilitates speedy composition and so, while usefully serving a practical end, ultimately results in musical impoverishment can easily be disregarded when the technique is put to such effective ends as I demonstrate here. Television's rapid production process and relatively limited budget obviously necessitate that music be composed quickly, so it

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is surely an achievement that these problems are overcome so propitiously: the score's greatest potential weakness becomes its greatest strength.

Angel uses leitmotifs within single episodes, across seasons, and across the entire series, to identify characters with their choices, actions, feelings, relationships—in short, with their place in the show. Music's power to recall and embody so much in just a few notes contributes a deeper narrative texture, a richness of meaning. Leitmotifs are sometimes used as musical blocks unto themselves, sometimes as part of musical blocks, and sometimes they are developed. With each occurrence, they accumulate a newer meaning, continually enhancing our interpretation of the drama. The first season is particularly leitmotivically scored, the later seasons less so. While leitmotifs attach themselves to particular characters, they seem in later seasons rather to map onto states of mind, emotions, or relationships. Christopher Wiley has observed that the most oft-quoted leitmotifs in *Buffy* “concern the relationship between characters [. . .] whereas those of [*Angel*] refer to a specific individual.”²¹ The changed musical focus in later seasons of *Angel* accords with this view, since Joss Whedon has stated that the show was originally intended to be composed of more stand-alone episodes than *Buffy*, but he quickly came to realize that the show's primary interest lay in the characters and their relationships. It might also be argued that leitmotif is used most frequently in season one in order to establish *Angel/Angel* as an individual character/show, distinct from *Buffy/Buffy*. One characteristic noticeably common to *Buffy* and *Angel* is the enormous range of development each character undergoes—far more than characters in serial drama usually achieve. The score often contributes to the progression of this development.

The Conceptual Integration Network diagram (hereafter CIN), proposed and developed primarily by linguists Mark Turner and Gilles Fauconnier, was adapted for the analysis of musical multimedia, first by Lawrence Zbikowski for the analysis of the text-music relationship in song settings, and more recently by Nicholas Cook in a range of work alternately looking at television commercials and traditions of music criticism.²² This model, with some further adaptation, is a useful tool for analyzing leitmotif in *Angel*. My modification is required because of the relationships between the distinct aspects of this medium. It is not simply that the music maps its qualities onto the scene it accompanies, or that the characteristics of the scene are associated with the music (too often the as-

sumption in film music scholarship). Rather, both happen simultaneously, and reciprocally: a visual cue can lead us to expect certain music, just as music can prime us for a particular event or character, a more specific “reville.” My CIN diagrams employ visual, musical, and generic spaces, and an additional “mnemonic” space, which summarizes all blended spaces associated with previous statements of the motif, the elements signified by it, and their additive or contrastive contributions to its meaning.

The Angel Motifs

The fight scene from *Angel*'s first teaser sequence (A1.1) is accompanied by standard “action” music: loud, fast, syncopated, and rhythmic. A slow-moving fifth-based melody on horns (see example 8.2) is stated once during the fight itself, as part of the action music continues, and again as Angel leaves, accompanied by sustained chords. CIN 1 isolates the key elements of the sequence.

This theme recurs after Angel has encountered Doyle for the first time (see CIN 2). Doyle's suggestion that he must get to know people in order to save them makes Angel decidedly uneasy. Doyle's challenge—“are you game?”—to take a more socially oriented view of salvation also presents him with a chance to find the redemption he craves. The motif is truncated, its final note unresolved. The soft dynamic and instrumentation map onto the intimate dialogue, especially Angel's almost confessional line, “I'm not good with people.” It is particularly through the use of musical recollection of the opening fight sequence that this scene achieves

(a) $\text{♩} = 150$
Horns

Example 8.2. *Angel*: the “Angel” theme

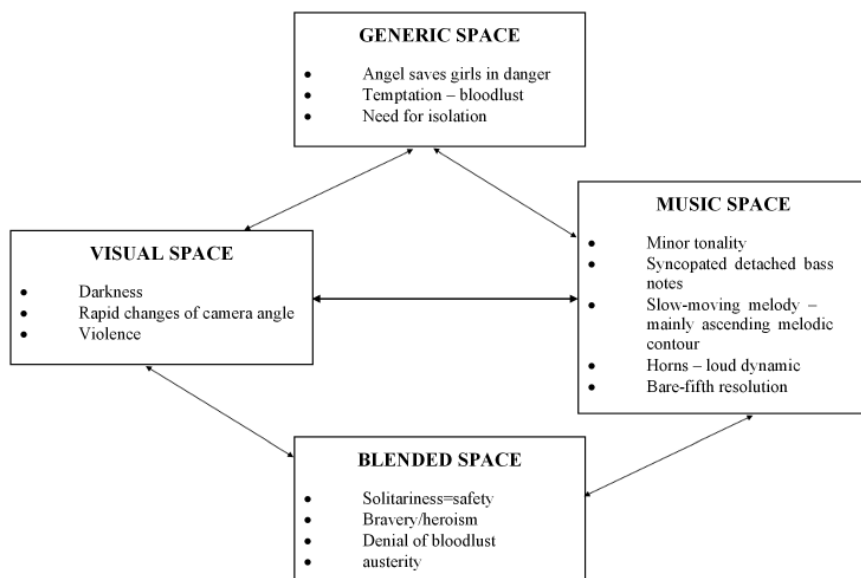


Figure 8.1. CIN 1, “City Of” (A1.1)

its pathos. Toward the end of this episode, Cordelia gratefully offers to help Angel set up business as a savior for hire. Doyle is in favor, noting that Cordelia will keep Angel in touch with the world; but Angel is still not entirely certain. Again it is up to Doyle—who has his own reasons for wanting Cordelia around—to try to persuade him; again he poses the question, and again we hear the same music.²³ This occurrence fuses the elements of the previous two to some extent, and resolves the conflict between them (see CIN 3). Musically, too, there is a brief moment of respite from minor tonality (see example 8.3, especially bars 3–4). The use of the piano—since the nineteenth century, the instrument of domestic music-making, a family instrument—lends the scene a “homely” color, and the relatively high melodic pitch is a strong contrast to what has gone before. The intimate tone is no longer melancholy: the motif is developed sequentially, and reharmonized (the first time that it is not simply reiterated in its original form), the musical procedure mapping onto Angel’s compromise. The reintroduction of the theme in its heroic guise—a loud dynamic level, the use of horns—as Angel answers Doyle’s second question—“Are you game?”—brings a sense of heroic determination to his answer: “I’m game.” The full triadic resolution reinforces the sense of closure, as does the climactic crescendo that precedes it.

♩ = 50
Piano

Horns *mf*

Strings *p*

7 *f* *fff* *mp*

mp *ff* *mf*

Example 8.3. Angel: developed version of the “Angel” theme from “City Of” (A1.1)

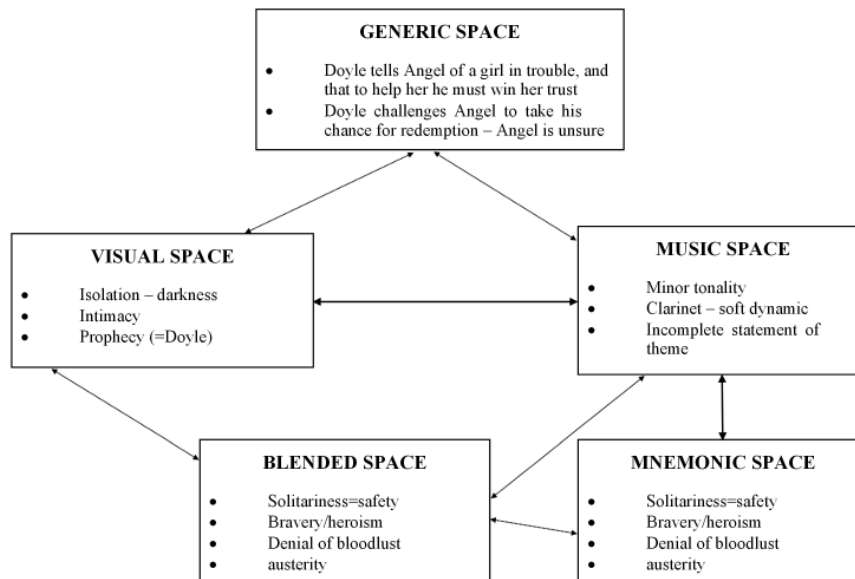


Figure 8.2. CIN 2, “City Of” (A1.1)

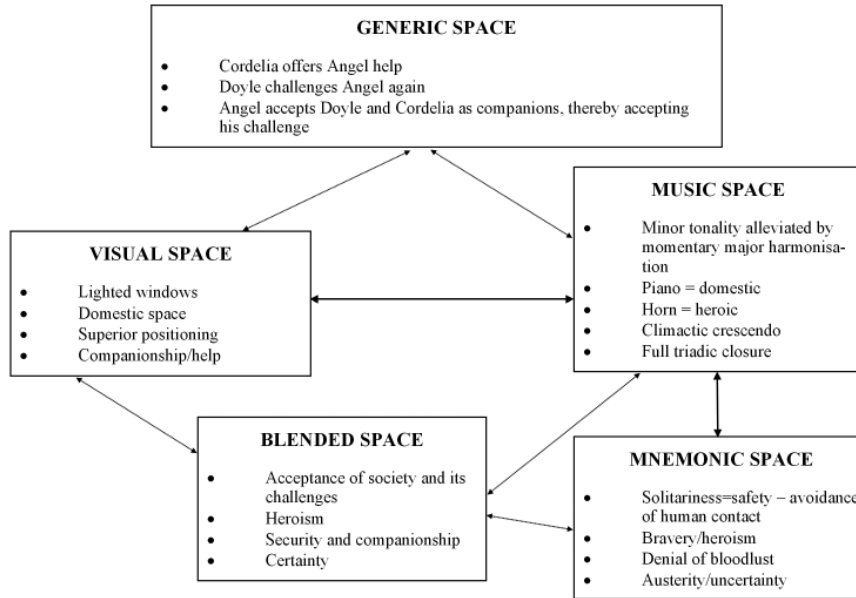


Figure 8.3. CIN 3, “City Of” (A1.1)

So, within the forty-minute span of this episode the phrase has conflated Angel’s bravery, heroism, and self-sacrifice in all its forms, the possibility of his redemption, and his acceptance of the opportunity to seek it (and to some extent, through his agreement to work with Doyle and Cordelia, his reentry into the sphere of human society). Being associated with Doyle’s challenge, it represents a higher order, and Angel’s powerlessness to struggle against the Powers That Be, as personified by Doyle through whose visions they impart information. This musical repetition has nuanced our interpretation of Angel’s personal journey toward accepting his place in the world and his mission to achieve redemption for his past evil by helping those in need.

In “I Will Remember You” (A1.9), Angel visits the Oracles for a second time, to ask them to return him to his vampire state in order to save Buffy’s life. The male Oracle protests that “temporal folds are not to indulge the whims of lower beings”; his sister retorts, “You are wrong. This one is willing to sacrifice every drop of human happiness and love he has ever known for another. He is not a lower being.”²⁴ A higher-pitched melody and a higher tonality create a different sound world here, reflecting the otherworldliness of the Oracles’ domain (see CIN 4). The extremely slow tempo

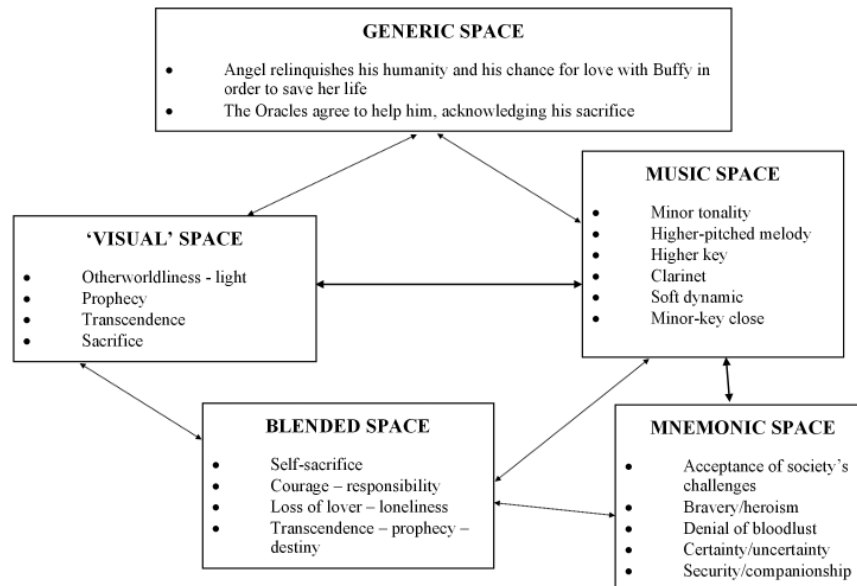


Figure 8.4. CIN 4, “I Will Remember You” (A1.8)

and soft dynamic map onto the female Oracle’s acknowledgment of Angel’s sacrifice. The use of clarinet—an instrument previously employed to denote intimacy—adds emotive weight to the Oracle’s sympathy for Angel as the hierarchical boundaries are momentarily breached. The minor-key closure coincides with the Oracles’ description of the results of the temporal fold. (The harmonic progression, with its charged sharpened fourth, is perfectly logical, but not entirely normal.) The theme hereby acquires associations of transcendence, balancing Angel’s past (guilt/curse), his present (heroism), and his future (redemption).

The teaser to “War Zone” (A1.20) exemplifies a different application of this technique. The episode opens, not unusually, with a young girl, alone and clearly frightened, pursued through the dark, downtown alleys by a group of vampires. As they close in on the girl, a truck pulls up. The vampires turn round; their leader sneers “you!” As the heroic music begins, the camera pans up from a man’s feet, taking in a long, dark overcoat. As Gunn’s face comes into the shot, the music breaks off as he asks, “You expectin’ someone else?”—which, of course, the audience was.²⁵

The sudden abandonment of the motif, and interrupted harmonic progression coincident with the pan up to the new character’s face, maps

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first and foremost onto the viewer's surprise, but there is more than mere shock involved here. Is the underscore seeking to imbue Gunn with the qualities by now associated with Angel and his colleagues? Similarities of situation—the weapons, which recall those used by Angel, the long overcoat, the nocturnal vampire-hunting, and the fact that the vampires clearly recognize and fear this man—certainly invite the comparison. Gunn appears to be doing Angel's job; and the score at first implies that he is a hero for doing it. But this statement of the theme is broken off abruptly, and—as with Angel's inability to answer Doyle's question, which was accompanied by an incomplete statement of the theme—this procedure of deferral of thematic or harmonic closure usually has a narrative reason.

As it turns out, Gunn is not heroic in the way that Angel is. He is not destined to fight evil in this way—he chooses to do it. Nor is he seeking redemption, although ironically, in this episode he does acquire something to atone for—his failure to protect his sister, whom he is forced to kill when she is sired—and even the fragmentary use of this theme implies that Gunn, at least potentially, could be a hero too. The interrupted cadence, then, in fact calls into question Gunn's possession of the attributes that the music has helped to identify with Angel, albeit at some remove from the events it immediately accompanies. Although the underscore plays to the viewer's initial expectations—expectations fostered deliberately through repeated music-image association—its use here is in some senses “supernarrative,” for it invites the viewer to draw conclusions that the characters themselves do not, retrospectively indicating that this man is not Angel, in all senses of the word, and it makes its point by undermining its most immediate implication, namely, heroism on the part of the character on-screen.²⁶

A similar use of this thematic interruption occurs in “Guise Will Be Guise” (A2.6), as Wesley pretends to be Angel. Again, there is the shot of the long overcoat, and the camera pans up to reveal Wesley as he declares “I'm Angel,” before promptly tripping over himself.²⁷

The theme is also used as a simple identifier, recalling some of these associations: it is heard in “Lonely Heart” (A1.2) when Angel gives Kate his business card, in “I Fall to Pieces” (A1.4) as Angel says “Guess I'm going to work,” again as he saves Melissa from Ronald, and in “Parting Gifts” (A1.10) when he and Wesley search for the kidnapped Cordelia. It also accompanies the man telling him “maybe you are an angel” in “I've

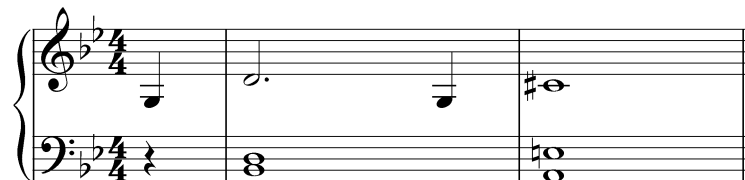
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Got You Under My Skin” (A1.14). It acquires a rather grislier association in “Reunion” (A2.10), as it accompanies Angel’s arrival at Holland Manners’s home, before he locks several of Wolfram and Hart’s employees in the wine cellar with Darla and Drusilla. This is an unusual deployment of the theme, which has until now been associated with Angel’s acts of heroism. The theme is heard again in “Carpe Noctem” (A3.4) as Angel, in Marcus’s body, looks into the mirror. As Angel comes round and realizes what has been done to him, the theme serves both to echo his realization that his body has been switched, and to confirm the plot point. By recalling one of the ideas driving the story arc, the Shanshu prophecy, it also highlights how, by being placed in an elderly, ailing body, Angel is in fact experiencing a foretaste of the downside of becoming human.

Although the theme is used less in seasons two to four, it reappears in season five. It is heard in “Conviction” (A5.1), twice during the opening scene, the second time ending similarly to its first appearance in “City Of” (A1.1), and again during the same episode as the girl asks Angel “Who are you?” While answering the question, this long-range recollection serves to remind the viewer exactly who Angel is, what he has been through, done, and what he hopes to achieve. It is heard again during the same episode as Angel inspects the motor pool that has come with his new position as CEO of Wolfram and Hart, adding another new layer of meaning. It is heard again in “You’re Welcome” (A5.12), as Angel says “I’m Angel”—heightening the sense of self-affirmation that has come to be one of the principal concerns of this season, as the privileges and temptations of their move into Wolfram and Hart has tested everyone’s sense of who they are.

There is also a secondary motif (see example 8.4), which is first heard in “In the Dark” (A1.3) as Oz presents Angel with the Gem of Amarra; in the same episode it accompanies Angel hiding the Gem, Doyle and

Lento



Example 8.4. Angel: the secondary “Angel” motif

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Cordelia searching for it, and Angel walking in the sun while wearing it. While it might therefore be said to attach to the Gem itself, it seems to function rather as a symbol for the mystical imperviousness that the Gem brings to any vampire who wears it. It is used in the very next episode, “I Fall to Pieces” (A1.4), as Angel introduces himself to Melissa; in “Somnambulist” (A1.11) it features in the action music accompanying Angel’s fight with Penn; in “Expecting” (A1.12), a varied version underscores Angel’s conversation with Serena; and in “The Ring” (A1.16) it accompanies Angel’s search for Jack. Having been associated with the offer of imperviousness to all harm—in a sense, better than humanity—which Angel has rejected, the theme now recalls Angel’s sacrifice, his determination not to forget the people “lost in the night, and the things that prey on them,” and his destruction of the Gem. In each of these subsequent examples, the theme underscores Angel helping those people for whom he sacrificed a relatively “normal” life.²⁸ Rather like the first “Angel motif,” this theme also seems to end up functioning as an identifier: it is heard in “Untouched” (A2.4), as Bethany asks Angel who he is; it accompanies Wesley (pretending to be Angel) scaring off Virginia’s attackers in the magic shop in “Guise Will Be Guise” (A2.6); and in “The Thin Dead Line” (A2.14) it accompanies the girl’s description of how Angel tried to help her.

This motif is also significant in that this harmonic progression is identical to the one used by Danny Elfman in his score to Tim Burton’s *Batman*.²⁹ *Angel* is littered with comparisons of Angel and Batman within both the dialogue and the show’s visual style, as has been discussed extensively by Janet Halfyard.³⁰ This subtle musical participation in a larger, and quite self-conscious, association with Batman once again demonstrates how the underscore contributes to a wider construction of a layered, nuanced narrative meaning.

The Doyle Motif

Although drastically compressed, the musical procedures employed in “Hero” (A1.9) to refer to Doyle’s self-sacrifice are remarkably similar to those pertaining to Angel himself. In a partial flashback sequence, Doyle tells Angel of his earlier encounter with the Scourge. A half-breed bracken demon came to Doyle for help, claiming that they shared family ties. Doyle’s refusal to help—having only just learned of the demon side

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he still struggles fully to accept—prompted his first vision, which he felt compelled to verify. The scenes of Doyle witnessing the aftermath of the Scourge massacre are accompanied by a haunting cue featuring a wordless vocal solo. Later, Rieff goes in search of Doyle and finds his “corpse,” Angel having broken his neck to prove his allegiance to the Scourge’s cause.

The first occurrence of this theme (see example 8.5), accompanying Doyle’s discovery of the massacred demons, serves first as a general “tragic” theme. But its use in flashback, to accompany not a present event, but Doyle’s narration of it, evokes more than that. Doyle has hitherto remained elusive about his past, but now proffers his self-explanation. Doyle’s inability to accept himself as half-demon, and his cowardice, led to his failure to save the bracken demons from the Scourge. Beyond his immediate horror at what he saw, then, this theme also gives voice to Doyle’s guilt and his need to atone for his failure to act, thereby summarizing his past. The second statement, interrupted when Doyle turns out not to be dead, again invites a comparison. Rieff ran away from his family to escape his demon roots; had he not, he and Doyle would not have encountered the Scourge, Angel would not have joined them, the ship’s departure would not have been delayed, and the Scourge would have missed the clan entirely. When Rieff sees what he thinks is Doyle’s corpse, the underscore immediately establishes a parallel situation. Doyle’s inability to accept himself leads to a demon massacre, as Rieff’s led (he thinks) to Doyle’s death.

That it almost led to another Scourge massacre, by delaying the departure of the ship, is especially significant for the next occurrence of the

♩ = 54
Voice
ah
Strings
ah

5
ah
ah

Example 8.5. *Angel*: the “Doyle” theme

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musical block, which consists of three successive repetitions of the theme. The first and third, as Doyle says goodbye and as Angel and Cordelia take in his death respectively, are melancholic; the second triumphant and heroic as he disconnects the Beacon and dies. By this time the theme has come to represent not only his own, but also Rieff's, difficulty in accepting the legacy of a demon parent. Through his self-sacrifice, he not only atones for his own previous failure, but also prevents a massacre that Rieff would have been partly responsible for, and so spares *him* a similar guilt. He is in all senses ready to die. His secrets are out, as Cordelia now knows that he is half demon, and he is happy for her to know and is not afraid of the consequences of telling her how he feels, because he now accepts himself. He also understands how Angel does what he does, demonstrating a bravery that previously baffled him. Having presented Angel with a chance to atone for his past, he now sees a similar chance for himself, and takes it.

There are four subsequent statements of this motif, each one abbreviated. In "Parting Gifts" (A1.10) the theme accompanies Cordy telling Barney about Doyle, and again, the first few notes accompany Angel telling Wesley that he "had someone by [his] side." The third statement, as Cordy irons and frames her sketch of her first vision, comprises only the first rising phrase. Having previously commented that there was nothing of Doyle's to remember him by, not even a coffee cup, this picture will serve, she says, as a reminder that he was part of the team and something of his will always be with them. As she and Angel come to terms with Doyle's death, so each statement of his theme is progressively truncated.

The final statement comes in "Power Play" (A5.21), when Spike agrees to be part of the massacre of the Circle of the Black Thorn, even though it is likely to be a suicide mission. This musical recollection of Doyle's self-sacrifice connects the two characters and serves to bring the series full circle; the office may have changed, the team may be different, but the mission is the same. The willing agreement to do what must be done foreshadows Angel's own signing away of the Shanshu prophecy in "Not Fade Away" (A5.22).³¹

Borrowed Material: Source Music in *Angel*

The earliest critical attention paid to the music in *Buffy* focused on the popular songs used in the show.³² *Angel* does not make such extensive

use of preexisting material as *Buffy*. While there is no *Angel* equivalent of The Bronze, the demon karaoke bar Caritas, featured in season two, is a similar performance space. However, The Bronze served primarily as a location, and an opportunity to feature bands performing live, adding, as Donnelly notes, to the show's attractiveness;³³ Caritas does not feature so many "professional" performers, nor does it feature in *Angel* for the length of time that The Bronze does in *Buffy*. Just as the terminological division of diegetic/non-diegetic is, I believe, inappropriate for the narrative functions served by music in television, the distinction with regard to performances in Caritas oversimplifies a much more fluid situation. As Julie Brown observes of Vonda Shepard's performances in *Ally McBeal*,

Shepard is not simply an entertainer in the bar; her lyrics are relevant as annotations to the drama, and her own role as carrier of those lyrics—narrating presence, simple entertainer, sung voice-over—changes: our understanding of her function depends on how far up in the soundtrack mix she is, how central to the camera shot, and how long she is on screen.³⁴

This idea of music moving between the realms of underscore and what Brown calls "overscore," that a single cue can exist in different narrative domains, sometimes simultaneously, is as true of television as it is of film, and as true of composed score as it is of songs. In *Angel*'s dream in "First Impressions" (A2.3), for instance, Lorne's performance of Oleta Adams's "Get Here" while *Angel* and Darla dance, although "diegetic," also functions as underscore. After delivering his vocal-coach-like verdict on *Angel*'s performance, he gives his "diagnosis" and takes the stage. When *Angel* finds Darla, his line "you came" is rather like someone who has just performed at an open mike night. (There is humorous surprise in his response to her declaration that she had been there all the time, as if to say "You've heard me sing, and you still love me?") As they dance, the club instantaneously empties, and Lorne's now private performance, still in the shot, expresses *Angel*'s desire for Darla, who the audience knows has been resurrected but who *Angel* believes/believed is dead, mapping onto the line "I want you all to myself." At the cut to a sleeping *Angel*, a creepy music-box-like cue reveals that the scene, including Lorne's advice, has been a dream.

Some of the songs used, however, work as a commentary on the action (particularly retrospectively) or, to use Brown's phrase, "annotations to the drama," endowing the underscore with an almost choric quality.

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“Judgment” (A2.1) opens with the as-yet unidentified Lorne singing Gloria Gaynor’s “I Will Survive” as an overture to a little monologue about how dangerous life in L.A. can be; following her vision, Cordy’s answer to Angel’s inquiry after her health is a verbatim quotation of that song title. The cut to Lorne singing “I Left My Heart in San Francisco” as James visits Dr. Gregson to undergo a heart-removal procedure is hardly subtle, and serves also as a confirmation for any viewers who might not have followed the plot point (“Heartthrob,” A3.1). Gunn, Fred, and Lorne’s attempt to escape at the end of “The House Always Wins” (A4.3) is accompanied by the lines “Bright light city gonna set my soul on fire” from Doc Pomus and Mort Shuman’s “Viva Las Vegas,” surely a comment on the corrupting influence of gambling and the mystical manipulation of members of Lorne’s audience, and also perhaps his shared responsibility through his enforced participation in the scam.³⁵ Although *Buffy* uses songs more frequently than *Angel*, they rarely serve the same specifically choric function.³⁶ A rare exception is Michelle Branch’s “Goodbye to You,” performed live at The Bronze in “Tabula Rasa” (B6.8), where the lyrics seem not only to echo the characters’ feelings—this is the episode where Willow’s increasing dependence on magic leads Tara to break off their relationship, Giles leaves for England, and in reaction to the announcement of his departure, Buffy embarks upon her illicit and self-destructive affair with Spike—but also to reflect the audience’s view of these events. The song is an elegy for the show and characters as they were, reinforcing the feeling that this pivotal episode marks a watershed, after which nothing will ever be quite the same:

It feels like I’m starting all over again
The last three years were just pretend
And I said
Goodbye to you
Goodbye to everything I thought I knew
You were the one I loved
The one thing that I tried to hold on to³⁷

Joss Whedon has written somewhat disparagingly of what Brown calls the “MTV style.”³⁸ “A lot of shows that involve teenagers,” he writes, “use songs to the point of abuse—‘pass the salt’ means ‘cue pointless montage to accommodate hit song and lack of plot.’”³⁹ In this instance, however, the song in question does more than echo the feelings of characters and audience.

After a four-bar introduction and a regular antecedent-consequent phrase pair, an extra half bar is inserted between the third and fourth phrases; the beginning of the fourth phrase coincides with a surprising shift to the major supertonic chord. The extra half bar occurs again in the chorus, coinciding with the line “You were the one I loved,” with the same harmonic move for the final line. There is also an extra bar in the middle eight—or, rather, the “middle nine.” This irregular harmonic and rhythmic structure adds to the sense that things are falling apart; the emotions expressed cannot quite be contained within a regular, “normal” phrase-structure.

Another, less obvious, instance of source music not only participating in the narrative but also taking meaning from and contributing to a wider leit-motivic network may be found in “Beneath You” (B7.2). The techno music playing in the German club while the Potential is chased and murdered is Stillste Stund’s “Von der Tiefe,” which features the vocal line “von der Tiefe verschlingt es”—“from the deep [i.e., beneath] it devours”—a motto referring to The First that will recur throughout the season. The title of this episode, containing a tour de force performance by James Marsters, also refers to Buffy’s rejection of Spike in “As You Were” (B6.14) and Cicely’s rejection of him in “Fool for Love” (B5.7). The title is also undercut by Spike’s utter psychological devastation, the guilt he now feels at his evil past, the realization that he may never find the love and forgiveness he craves, and his suffering at the hands of The First.

Angel, aimed at a slightly older audience, necessarily features fewer “teen montage” moments. Nevertheless, Kim Richey’s “A Place Called Home” is deployed to most poignant effect at the end of “Shells” (A5.16). Fred’s body having been taken over by Illyria, the episode closes with a flashback sequence showing a young, optimistic Fred moving to L.A. Again, the lyric (which contains the most appropriate couplet, “Started off a crazy kid / Miracle I made it through the things I did”) is significant, expressing the hope of a better life and the search for a sense of belonging:

Some day I’ll go
 Where there ain’t no rain or snow
 ’Til then, I travel alone
 And I make my bed
 With the stars above my head
 And dream of a place called home.⁴⁰

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The musical style itself is highly appropriate for Winifred Burkle; the “new country” sound harks back to Fred’s Texan origin, and its straightforward, balladic style is the hallmark of a woman reluctant to appear “snooty.” This lyric also carries particular meaning for Fred’s story arc: having moved to the city to study physics, she inadvertently opened a portal to Pylea, where for five years she was a slave and a fugitive; when her parents finally track her down, they come to realize, even before she does, that she has found her place in the world as part of Angel’s team (to which he himself often refers as family) and, later, even more so as head scientist at Wolfram and Hart. The sudden invasion of her body by Illyria is followed with the story of how she came to be in L.A., how, in effect, the chain of events that leads to her final moments began. The lyric gives meaning to the images, proffering a reason for her leaving home, and recalling the sense of belonging she felt at Angel Investigations. Set as they are, in the present tense, the words also suggest that this “dream of a place called home” is still in progress, and that her time in L.A. was just another stop on Fred’s troubled journey to a better place.⁴¹

Musical Spaces: Caritas

With the introduction of Caritas, the demon karaoke bar, in season two, *Angel* takes an even more musical turn. As *Buffy* explores the television musical in “Once More, With Feeling,” similar themes are more thoroughly played out, and to a greater extent, in this entire season.⁴² That Lorne can read people’s auras only when they sing (apparently only partly true—if feelings run strongly enough, singing is not necessary for Lorne to perform a reading) draws on *Buffy*’s implication that musical performance is both liberating and revelatory. In “Once More, With Feeling,” Sweet, the musical demon, actually enables characters to be honest: they cannot help but sing the truths they have hitherto endeavored to conceal. Xander and Anya list the things they dislike about each other and express their fears for their future together. Furthermore, Anya complains that their number, generically, is “a retro pastiche that’s never gonna be a breakaway pop hit”—again reflecting her concern that her mortal human life will be a disappointment. Given that their wedding never takes place, because of Xander’s fear of what he is led to believe he will become, this is indeed prophetic. In a flashback sequence in “Selfless” (B7.5), Anya

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performs a song set at the time of “Once More, With Feeling.” Building on her verse from “I’ll Never Tell,”

This is the man that I plan to entangle
Isn’t he fine?
My claim to fame was to maim and to mangle
Vengeance was mine!
But I’m out of the biz,
The name I made I’ll trade for his

Centered on the meaning of names and the significance of the identity they help to construct, she sings of how she will take Xander’s name in marriage and how this will, she feels, augment her worth to the world:

Mr. Xander Harris, that’s what he is to the world outside,
That’s the name he carries with pride.
I’m just lately “Anya,” not very much to the world, I know.
All these years, with nothing to show.
[. . .] on the whole I’ve had no path.
I like to bowl, I’m good with math,
But who am I?
Now I reply:
I’m the missus,
I will be his missus.
Mrs. Anya Christina Emmanuella Jenkins Harris!⁴³

However, her song is left unfinished. Just as Anya reaches the conclusion of the final chorus, the scene cuts back to demon Anyanka in the frat house with a sword through her heart. Although in this instance Anya’s life is spared, the manner of her would-be death now foreshadows her violent eventual end in “Chosen” (B7.22).

Tara’s song “I’m Under Your Spell” is also fateful. Although, as she sings it, Tara is merely expressing how Willow’s love for her has completed her and fulfilled her as a person and, more particularly, as a young gay woman (and, of course, as a regular character in the show), the melody of the chorus reappears in the underscore as she discovers the Lethe’s Bramble that Willow used to erase her memory of their earlier argument. She is under Willow’s spell more literally than she realized in her song;

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it is the mystical mind-control that she later describes as “violation.” We never hear the end of Tara’s song as the scene cuts back to the Magic Shop before its concluding “you make me complete.” In both Anya’s and Tara’s cases, the narrative interruption of their vocal performances foreshadows their deaths.

Although obvious similarities exist between “Once More, With Feeling” and Hans Christian Andersen’s tale *The Red Shoes*, on which the famed 1948 film starring Moira Shearer is based, Sweet’s inviting Buffy to dance until she combusts also alludes to Stravinsky’s *The Rite of Spring*, the ballet based on Russian paganism in which a young sacrificial girl (who is, appropriately, referred to in the plot synopsis of the ballet as “The Chosen One”) is made to dance herself to death in order to appease the Gods of Spring.⁴⁴ This meta-textuality—a ballet about dance—also applies to “Once More, With Feeling,” in that the characters are aware that they are singing, or have sung, and that, although it is odd, they have or had no power to stop themselves at the time. This fact is of critical importance for understanding the relationship of “Once More, With Feeling” to the Hollywood musical. As is always the case in the Whedonverse, the episode does not simply follow generic convention, but rather throws those conventions into relief by breaking with them.

The concept of the “phenomenal song” also casts a long shadow here. Coined by Carolyn Abbate, the term refers to moments in opera where singing is “audible” to the characters onstage, where the “singer” himself and his “audience” are both aware of the act of singing, the usual operatic assumption being that the music is non-diegetic (Gorbman’s “invisibility” and “inaudibility”). Abbate defines the phenomenal song as “a musical or vocal performance that declares itself openly, singing that is heard by the singer, the auditors on stage, and understood as ‘music that they (too) hear’ by us.” “Once More, With Feeling” is phenomenal song writ large. Indeed, in her discussion of the “Légende de la fille du Paria” (the so-called “Bell Song”) from Delibes’ *Lakmé*, Abbate notes that “the scene demonstrates the ways in which vocal performance will indeed overpower plot, for Gerald, the besotted British officer, is attracted not by the tale but by the voice that sings it.”⁴⁵

This awareness of performance is particularly relevant to *Angel*. The characters here, however, intentionally choose, as opposed to being mystically impelled, to sing; they do so to discover their unknown destinies,

rather than to reveal to others what they already know about themselves. While Sweet seems to know what's coming, and so shows no surprise when Buffy makes her revelation, his motivation is little other than a simple voyeuristic pleasure in provoking and then witnessing what amounts to suicide. He, like many of the demons on *Buffy*, is a two-dimensional character, serving a necessary dramatic purpose rather than raising pertinent thematic questions. Although Xander summoned him because he wanted to know that he and Anya would be "okay," the pleasure Sweet derives from the suffering he causes is of an order altogether different from Lorne's enjoyment of his club and the fulfillment he finds in helping his clientele—and, of course, Sweet's expectation that whoever summons him joins him as his "queen" might be his ultimate reward. Lorne, in contrast, does not seem to know his clients' fate in advance, although this situation is not always so clear-cut.

At some point, most of the main characters perform for Lorne. The characters' varying levels of accomplishment are used as a characterizing device. It is no coincidence that Angel, Cordelia, and Fred all give fairly painful renditions. Angel is awful, and knows it, and David Boreanaz's toe-curling performances make for some excellent comic moments, as do his colleagues' sheer dread that he might have to sing to solve a case. Unused to being bad at something, in his dream in "First Impressions" (A2.3) he has practiced his medley in the shower, to Lorne's approval. His baffling choice of Wang Chung's "Everybody Have Fun Tonight" ("Dear Boy," A2.5), delivered to a stone-cold reception, is perhaps most excruciating—but then, how could a vampire with a soul who craves nothing more than sitting alone in the dark cradling a glass of pig's blood and brooding over his sinful past possibly give a convincing performance of a song like this?

After Angel fires them, Cordy, Gunn, and Wes drunkenly sing Queen's "We Are the Champions" in "Redefinition" (A2.11)—given that it is Angel who has been referred to as a "champion" (since "Judgment," A2.1), this is a moment of celebration that they are continuing to "fight the good fight" without Angel, and a proud declaration of their new group identity. Again, the song's title and lyrics act as a neat expression of the characters' feelings. When Fred is taken to the bar, the irony of her choice of "Crazy" is lost on no one. (Indeed, Cordy rebuffs suspicious glances by protesting "she chose this song herself, I swear!") Again, the act of

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singing has brought about a revelation of destiny: Fred's resourcefulness and courage in the ensuing hostage situation prove the strength Gunn has already seen in her; the next time she demonstrates those qualities, it convinces Fred, and her parents, that her place is with Angel's team. It is telling, given that season two foregrounds the theme of redemption, as the Shanshu prophecy gives Angel greater hope that his fight against demons internal and external will gain him his humanity, that in "Dead End" (A2.18) Angel considers singing "Stairway to Heaven."

Lindsey McDonald, says Lorne, "used to be a regular," until Angel and the gang started showing up at Caritas. This performance space is another thing Angel takes from Lindsey, a loss foreshadowing the amputation of Lindsey's hand ("To Shanshu in L.A.," A1.22). The first thing Lindsey does with his new "evil" hand is pick up his guitar and return to Caritas ("Dead End," A2.18), in meaningful contrast to the scene where his prosthetic hand makes it difficult to open a compact disc case for Darla ("Judgment," A2.1). His performance of "L.A.," written by *Angel* producer David Greenwalt, impresses everyone—including Lorne, who watches his performance with admiration—and arouses Angel's jealousy. In "A Hole in the World" (A5.15), Eve performs the same song, a musical reinforcement of their relationship. In *Angel's* musical world, then, the good guys are all fairly bad singers, while Angel's nemesis possesses musical ability vastly superior to that of the hero himself.

The greatest performances of all, however, come from Andy Hallett as Lorne, the one good guy who can *really* sing. In contrast to the other characters whose performances are good, by amateur standards at least, Lorne's vocal prowess lends him a musical authority just as his empathic powers and implied link to the Powers That Be cause Angel and his team to rely upon his guidance. So, while we are led to believe that here is one great performer we can trust, this superiority also reinforces his separation from Angel's team. Lorne's execution of Lindsey in his final scene ("Not Fade Away," A5.22) is astonishing for being both quite unforeseen and entirely out of character. Despite his distaste for the task, he carries out his role with professionalism; Lindsey's own shock confirms just how convincing Lorne's performance throughout their part of the mission has been. It is also surprising given that Lorne is by and large a reluctant member of the team. By his own admission he is "not a fighter"; he warns Angel that, if he survives the attack on the Circle of the Black Thorn, he

will have nothing more to do with the mission. He has already abandoned them once before (“Tomorrow,” A3.22), and his season-four return is due to their rescuing him from his predicament at the Tropicana rather than out of any sense of loyalty. When called upon to help out, he often does so only under extreme duress; he moves into the Hyperion not because of attachment to the group, but because his club has been destroyed (twice), and he feels it is the least Angel can do.

Lorne expresses most of his ideas about life and people in relation to music, and as a result performance-consciousness becomes an important concern for the characters themselves. Angel expresses his jealousy of Lindsey’s expertise with a musical critique (“what is that—rock, country, ballad . . . pick a style, pal!”), while Cordy comments that “I can’t just sing—I don’t even know if I’m musical” (A4.4), before giving a painful rendition of “The Greatest Love of All,” the Whitney Houston number she also sang in “The Puppet Show” (B1.9). Angel dreams he has been practicing his medley (Sondheim’s “Send in the Clowns” and Smokey Robinson’s “Tears of a Clown”) in the shower (“First Impressions,” A2.3) and was disappointed he couldn’t find a third song. In “Sleep Tight” (A3.16), Kim describes her new band as “mellow organic types,” their harmlessness evinced by their never touching drugs or playing a diminished chord; but as soon as their demon identities begin to reemerge, they begin playing “beyond industrial trash noise funk.” Just as Kim is temporarily “infected” by the demons in the band, her song is likewise tainted with a brief burst of threatening, violent lyrics quite out of keeping with the rest of the song. This continues the alignment of the underworld and aggressive guitar-based genres that permeates *Buffy* and *Angel*.⁴⁶

Lorne uses high notes—a top C in “Happy Anniversary” (A2.13), an F-sharp in “The House Always Wins” (A4.3), and a top G in “Sleep Tight” (A3.16)—to distract attackers. In Pylea, a dimension without music, he performs Holland-Dozier-Holland’s “Stop! In the Name of Love” to similar effect. It is noteworthy that, while he is happy to use his voice as a weapon, he rarely uses his anagogic ability against people. In “That Old Gang of Mine” (A3.3), Gio sings Bette Midler’s “The Wind Beneath My Wings,” unwittingly affording Lorne the opportunity to read him and gain information about his past that he uses to throw him off guard, which leads ultimately to Gio’s being devoured.

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This consideration of the various roles music plays in *Angel* attests to the show's enormous musical wealth, and the challenge that such a well-written series with so well-composed a score and such an intelligent engagement with musical culture can present to our understanding and so-far rather limited terminology. The more deeply we explore issues of music as a narrative agent—heard, unheard, within or without the drama—the clearer it becomes that the binaristic diegetic/non-diegetic, underscore/overscore approach not only fails to tell the whole picture, but in fact limits our interpretations, or at least prejudices them toward the music being one thing or another. The so-called “attention continuum” occupied by music in multimedia artforms is a sliding scale, not a toggle switch. Although the observations here, I admit, constitute rather more the diagnosis of a problem than the proposition of its cure, I hope at least to have shown that, at its best, music in television can function in the same ways as it does in film, with the same degree of sensitivity, a comparable level of technical accomplishment, and an at least equal degree of intelligence. The result is a rich text, full of cultural and emotional resonance, which fully repays close critical scrutiny and puts paid to the assumption that television is a cheaper and more disposable artistic commodity than film. It is high time that, in order to do fuller justice to the distinguished creative endeavor that *Angel* embodies, we refine our scholarly apparatus, at least attempting to match the complexity and subtlety of the situation it is our aim to understand. To quote a certain vampire, let's get to work.

Notes

1. Rhonda Wilcox, *Why Buffy Matters: The Art of Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2005). See especially chapter 1 for this defense of television as art.
2. A challenge to this auteur-centrism in the study of early film music can be found in Ben Winters, *Eric Wolfgang Korngold's the Adventures of Robin Hood: A Film Score Guide* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007).
3. This terminology is taken from Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983).
4. Karen Sayer, “This Was Our World and They Made It Theirs: Reading Space and Place in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel*,” In *Reading the Vampire Slayer: The New, Updated Unofficial Guide to Buffy and Angel*, ed. Roz Kaveney (London: I. B. Tauris, 2004), 136–37.

5. See James Buhler, "Analytical and Interpretative Approaches to Film Music (II): Analysing Interactions of Music and Film," in *Film Music: Critical Approaches*, ed. K. J. Donnelly (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001), 40.

6. The use of the terms "diegetic" and "non-diegetic" stems from Claudia Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (London: British Film Institute, 1987), 22–26.

7. J. K. Donnelly, *The Spectre of Sound: Music in Film and Television* (London: British Film Institute, 2005), 113.

8. In cinema, all the battle scenes in Steven Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan* are likewise unscored. Coupled with the use of hand-held camera, these sequences adopt an almost "home-movie" documentary style, whose hyperrealism is arguably more disturbing than a more traditionally "cinematic" approach. *The Blair Witch Project* adopts a similar style, to similar effect.

9. Roz Kaveney, for instance, describes the scripts as "operatic," while Donald Keller unwittingly touches on the concerns of the present chapter when he observes that the same music accompanies both Buffy's dream in "Graduation Day, Part 1" (B3.21) and Faith's dream in "This Year's Girl" (B4.15). See Kaveney, "She Saved the World. A Lot: An Introduction to the Themes and Structures of *Buffy* and *Angel*," in *Reading the Vampire Slayer: The New, Updated Unofficial Guide*, Kaveney, 33; Donald Keller, "Spirit Guides and Shadow Selves: From the Dream Life of Buffy (and Faith)," in *Fighting the Forces: What's at Stake in Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, ed. Rhonda V. Wilcox and David Lavery (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), 172.

10. Jeremy G. Butler, *Television: Critical Methods and Applications*, 3rd ed. (Mahwah, N.J.: Erlbaum, 2007), 191–92.

11. Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies*, 73–91.

12. Donnelly, *Spectre of Sound*, 111–13.

13. See Donnelly, *Spectre of Sound*, 119–24.

14. See Philip Tagg, *Kojak—50 Seconds of Television Music: Toward the Analysis of Affect in Popular Music* (Göteborg, Sweden: Skrifter från Musikvetenskapliga institutionen, 1979). Donnelly's identification of music as a brand-ident is particularly relevant to series comedies: *Friends* and *Will and Grace*, for instance, both make use of a limited number of musical "tags" at sectional points, whose musical style serves to identify the program and, less frequently, whose mood anticipates that of the following scene.

15. The *absence* of musical underscore is sometimes just as significant. See Robynn Stilwell, "The Music That Isn't There: *The Practice*" (unpublished MS, 1999).

16. Donnelly, *Spectre of Sound*, 114.

17. Donnelly, *Spectre of Sound*, 113.

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18. Arnold Whittall, "Leitmotif," *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Stanley Sadie and John Tyrrell, online at www.oxfordmusiconline.com (accessed October 27, 2008).

19. See Theodor W. Adorno and Hanns Eisler, *Composing for the Films*, rev. ed. (London: Athlone Press, 1994), 4–6.

20. At this point, Karen Sayer's observation that "though well versed in the conventions of genre TV, on the whole *Angel* is . . . more cinematic than *Buffy* and more willing to draw on those recent experiments that allude to the fact of cinematography for its effects" seems somewhat relevant to the present discussion. Indeed, bearing in mind Julie Brown's observation that "underscoring on television is far less pervasive than it is in film, particularly as part of dramas and situation comedies," one might posit that it is not only the operatic quality of the underscore, but *Angel*'s comparative musical saturation that contributes to its "cinematic" feel. See Sayer, "This Was Our World," 98–119, and Julie Brown, "Ally McBeal's Postmodern Soundtrack," *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 126, no. 2 (2001): 277.

21. Christopher Wiley, "Theorizing Television Music as Serial Art: *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and the Narratology of Thematic Score," in this volume.

22. See especially Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner, "Principles of Conceptual Integration," in *Discourse and Cognition: Bridging the Gap*, ed. Jean-Pierre Koenig, 269–83 (Stanford, Calif: Center for the Study of Language and Information, 1998); Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner, "Conceptual Integration Networks," *Cognitive Science* 22, no. 2 (April–June 1998): 133–87; Lawrence M. Zbikowski, "The Blossoms of 'Trockne Blumen': Music and Text in the Early Nineteenth Century," *Music Analysis* 18 (1999): 307–45; Nicholas Cook, "Theorizing Musical Meaning," *Music Theory Spectrum* 23, no. 3 (fall 2001), 170–95.

23. Although for the purposes of this chapter I am restricting the use of the term "leitmotif" to specifically musical contexts, it must be noted that there are other elements of the series that might be seen to be leitmotivic. The repetition of certain phrases is a common feature of the scripts of *Buffy* and *Angel*. Nikki Stafford, for instance, draws attention to *Angel*'s final line, "Let's get to work," an allusion to his line "Let's go to work" in "City Of" (A1.1) "when [he] realises how serious his mission is." Stafford, *Once Bitten: An Unofficial Guide to the World of Angel* (Toronto: ECW, 2004), 347. It is sadly beyond the scope of this chapter to examine more fully the role music undoubtedly plays in establishing and maintaining these structural parallels.

24. "I Will Remember You." *Angel* (Season 1). Dir. David Grossman. DVD. Twentieth Century Fox, 1999.

25. "War Zone." *Angel* (Season 1). Dir. David Straiton. DVD. Twentieth Century Fox, 1999.

26. I am aware that my formulation “invites the audience” is problematic, for it presupposes an analytical intention, or even volition, on the part of the viewer. However, it is the purpose of this study to examine why the underscore to *Angel* is composed in the way that it is, and central to this purpose is the assumption that it fulfils its aims successfully. In order to understand “why *this* music *here*?” a greater degree of analytical awareness than that brought to the show by “idle” viewers is both necessary and inevitable if the study is to move beyond mere observation into the territory of interpretation. This does not imply that viewers actively analyze the music as they watch the show, nor does it presuppose that the audience is utterly ignorant of the music.

27. “Guisse Will Be Guisse.” *Angel* (Season 2). Dir. Krishna Rao. DVD. Twentieth Century Fox, 2000. For a discussion of Alexis Denisov’s physical comedy in the role of Wesley, see Stacey Abbott, “Nobody Scream . . . or Touch My Arms’: the Comic Stylings of Wesley Wyndham-Pryce,” in *Reading Angel: The TV Spin-off with a Soul*, ed. Stacey Abbott (London: I. B. Tauris, 2005), 189–202.

28. It is of particular importance that Angel enjoys walking on a sunny beach while wearing the ring. In “Belonging” (A2.19) he enjoyed the “fake” sunshine of the studio lights on the set of Cordelia’s commercial. Similarly, when he arrives in Pylea and his human (and demon) characteristics are exaggerated, he gleefully runs around the sunny plain exclaiming “Can everyone just notice how much fire I’m not on?” The risk that Angel takes by living and working in such close proximity to the potentially lethal sunlight that permeates Los Angeles is interpreted as another aspect of his choosing the more difficult path to atonement. Gio, however, observes a general preference among vampires for sunny climates (“That Old Gang of Mine,” A3.3).

29. Tim Burton, dir., *Batman* (Warner Bros., 1989). The chord shift in question happens around forty-one seconds into the main title cue. I am grateful to James Longstaffe for pointing out this connection.

30. See Janet K. Halfyard, “The Dark Avenger: Angel and the Cinematic Superhero,” in Abbott, *Reading Angel*, 152–54.

31. Given that it is a policy common to both *Buffy* and *Angel* to bring back characters from earlier seasons toward the series’ end, this is also a clever musical nod toward Doyle, who could not make a physical appearance owing to Glenn Quinn’s tragic death.

32. See S. Renee Dechert, “My Boyfriend’s in the Band!': *Buffy* and the Rhetoric of Music,” in Wilcox and Lavery, *Fighting the Forces*, 218–26.

33. Donnelly, *Spectre of Sound*, 113.

34. Brown, “*Ally McBeal*’s Postmodern Soundtrack,” 280.

35. The more instantly recognizable chorus from the same song accompanies the gang’s arrival in Las Vegas. These quotations also thereby serve a structural

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purpose, acting as musical parentheses, opening the episode and drawing it to its close.

36. Dechert, “My Boyfriend’s in the Band!” 222. Dechert notes of the repeated use of Cream’s “Tales of Brave Ulysses” in “Band Candy” (B3.6) and “Forever” (B5.17) that “Giles mourns Joyce by listening to music that he links with their shared past.”

37. My transcription from Michelle Branch, *The Spirit Room* (Maverick Recording Co. compact disc 9362485082, 2001).

38. Brown, “*Ally McBeal*’s Postmodern Soundtrack,” 284–85.

39. Joss Whedon, Introduction to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer: Radio Sunnydale: Music from the TV Series*, various artists (Virgin Records compact disc VTCD587 7243 5 95593 2 2, 2003).

40. My transcription from Kim Richey, *Rise* (MCA compact disc MCAC170327.2, 2007).

41. For further exploration of the theme of family and belonging in *Angel*, see Jennifer Stoy, “Blood and Choice: The Theory and Practice of Family in *Angel*,” in Kaveney, *Reading the Vampire Slayer*, 220–32.

42. For discussion of “Once More, With Feeling,” see Wilcox, *Why Buffy Matters*, 191–205.

43. “Selfless.” *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Season 7). Dir. David Solomon. DVD. Twentieth Century Fox, 2002.

44. Christopher Wiley has pointed out to me that Buffy is referred to in French as “L’Élué”—which is also the term for “the chosen one” in French scores of *The Rite of Spring*.

45. Carolyn Abbate, *Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991), 5.

46. Dechert, “My Boyfriend’s in the Band!” 220–22.

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CHAPTER NINE

STILL FLYIN'?

**Conventions, Reversals,
and Musical Meaning in *Firefly***

Stanley C. Pelkey II



In his 1981 presidential address to the Western History Association, Vernon Carstensen noted, "It has been obvious for a long time that our real or imagined past as a pioneering people has excited great interest and has actually influenced behavior here and abroad."¹ Likewise, Howard Movshovitz has stated, "The West forms a basic imaginative landscape for Americans,"² while Rita Parks has called the Western "one of the most enduring and popular phenomena of American cultural history, letters, and . . . mass media entertainment."³ This is because "Westerns are based on a set of conventions so broadly receptive that each era of the twentieth century has expressed its preoccupations . . . through them."⁴

The Western became an important genre of American cinema from the inception of motion picture technology and was one of the most popular types of film during the 1940s and 1950s.⁵ Television also embraced the Western early in its history. *Hopalong Cassidy*, *The Cisco Kid*, *Judge Roy Bean*, *The Lone Ranger*, *Sky King*, and the long-running *Gunsmoke* and *Bonanza* are representative of the variety of television Westerns at midcentury. During the 1958–1959 television season, nine of the top eleven television programs were Westerns,⁶ including *Gunsmoke*, which was exported around the world.⁷ We also witness that decade's preoccupation with the Western when its conventions appear in series that normally have nothing to do with it, such as *I Love Lucy* ("The Indian Show," 1953) and *Leave It to Beaver* ("Next-Door Indians," 1958).⁸ Furthermore, *Little*



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House on the Prairie (1974–1983), *Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman* (1993–1998), the award-winning miniseries *Lonesome Dove* (1989) and *Into the West* (2005), and the many older film and television Westerns regularly shown today on cable television attest to the persistent popularity of the genre since the 1960s.

Science-fiction film and television have not been immune to the allure of the myth of the West. In 1935, Gene Autry starred in an early serial as “a cowboy involved in a science-fiction adventure called *The Phantom Empire* and set in a mysterious underground city.”⁹ In subsequent decades, the *Star Trek* franchise generated several episodes that use Western conventions and iconography. Indeed, we might view the Klingons, especially those depicted outside the original series, as the embodiment of futuristic gunfighters, thieves, and agents of lawlessness generally in “space, the final frontier.” They certainly take on that role in “Marauders” (2002) from *Star Trek: Enterprise*.¹⁰ Likewise, for all its sword-and-sorcery medievalism, *Star Wars Episode IV: A New Hope* (1977) draws heavily on the Western. The refugee droids, C-3PO and R2-D2, find themselves on a planet at the edge of the Empire (the frontier) in an arid land dotted by moisture farms (struggling homesteads), beyond which are even more inhospitable wastes haunted by savage, nomadic natives called Sand People. The implicit, if unintentional, relationship between the Sand People and the mis-imagined Indians of Westerns is reinforced in *Star Wars Episode II: Attack of the Clones* (2002) by their kidnapping of Shmi Skywalker.¹¹

Joss Whedon’s *Firefly* (2002) is a contemporary science-fiction Western, as Whedon himself has acknowledged.¹² Unlike *Star Trek*, which occasionally borrows from the Western, the entire conceit of *Firefly* is grounded in that tradition.¹³ And unlike *Back to the Future Part III* (1990) or other time-travel stories, such as the old *Doctor Who* serial “The Gunfighters” (1966), in which characters from the present or future go to the Old West,¹⁴ the characters in *Firefly* are already at home in the Western (albeit one projected into humanity’s future).

In this essay, I will explore how Whedon and his production team emulated but also manipulated elements of the Western. The result is that *Firefly* has several substantive thematic and moral reversals compared with the Western. I will also consider how Greg Edmonson’s musical score for the television series both strengthens the associations between *Firefly* and the Western and reinforces the series’ revisionist characteristics. Although

I will focus on the television program, I will draw upon some material from the film *Serenity* (2005).

An Overview of Music in *Firefly*

Viewers of *Firefly* are meant to understand that in the future, American and Chinese political systems and cultures have fused to form a single sociocultural entity.¹⁵ This fusion of East-West politics and culture is especially strong in the center of humanity's new solar system. The frontier moons and planets, however, have reverted to political, social, and cultural patterns strongly associated with the American West of the later nineteenth century. The sets, costumes, props, and other visual elements in *Firefly* help to establish this blending of Eastern and Western cultures.

Likewise, the music in the series can be heard as a blending of diverse traditions, genres, and instrumental styles. Greg Edmonson has noted that this was purposeful.¹⁶ Thus on a track such as "Inside the Tam House," arpeggiated piano writing reminiscent of New Age styles is combined with a flowing solo violin line and breathy highlights from an Asian ethnic flute.¹⁷

On the surface this is admirable, but one can read the musical practices of *Firefly* as ironically perpetuating stereotypical Western representations of Asian exoticism. Edmonson does not use actual Chinese pieces, nor is there clear evidence of consultation with—or performances by—master musicians of traditional Chinese musical culture for the soundtrack. There are a few times, such as on Persephone in the first episode, "Serenity" (F1), during which we hear street theater music (DVD timing: 23:39ff), when Edmonson imitates specific genres of traditional Chinese music.¹⁸ Most of the time, however, we are more likely to hear a range of musical gestures that have often been used to represent the East in Western film and opera. For example, early in the episode "The Train Job" (F2), Inara (Morena Baccarin)—a Companion, or high-class prostitute, who lives with the crew on the spaceship *Serenity*—brushes Kaylee's hair to the accompaniment of a lyrical cue featuring violin, plucked guitar, and an ethnic flute (possibly a traditional Chinese bamboo flute, such as the xiao or dizi).¹⁹ The music is lovely, but the presence of an ethnic flute in the ensemble, and the melody, which is based upon an anhemitonic pentatonic scale, a mode often used to represent non-Western cultures,

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are thoroughly in keeping with Western musical-narrative practices when evoking Asian culture.²⁰

A number of the “Asian” musical cues are associated with the (sexually) exotic Inara. Indeed, in the scene from “The Train Job,” Malcolm Reynolds (Nathan Fillion)—the captain of *Serenity* and the main character of the series—suggests that Kaylee (Jewel Staite) has become a client of Inara; although incorrect, this still reinforces the sense of Inara’s otherness. A subtle relationship is thus generated between Inara and “Asian” musical moments, and I would argue that this colors all such music in *Firefly* as exotic (or at least unusual) rather than as normative.

This implicit exoticism and Edmonson’s compositional practices have profound implications for our understanding of the role of Asian cultural materials generally in *Firefly*. Consider that we hear and see representations of Chinese language, and we see many other elements of traditional Chinese culture; very few Chinese characters, however, and certainly none of importance, populate the screen. In like manner, many of the “Asian” musical cues are used to establish scenes, generate transitions, or create moods rather than to accompany authentic cultural practices. The Middle Eastern and Indian singing styles that are used in “The Train Job” and “Heart of Gold” (F13) provide clear examples of this tendency. Granted, much of the Western-style music functions in the same manner. The fundamental difference is that we also hear Western music accompany cultural practices of Caucasian characters, as in the numerous dance scenes (high and low) throughout the series. In such cases, real cultural events are depicted with culturally appropriate music. There are no analogous moments associated with authentic Asian cultural practices. This further effaces the real presence of Chinese people (not to mention those of Middle Eastern and Indian descent) and their culture in the series, and it perpetuates the tendency of Western composers to represent Asian cultures “in general” (rather than each individually) by fairly generic musical topics that have often been heard to be exotic. Edmonson’s score is always clever, frequently brilliant, and often beautiful, but it implicitly projects Western musical styles (albeit enriched by non-Western elements) as normative within a world that is supposed to be a fusion of East and West.

Nevertheless, in keeping with the premise of the series as a whole, Edmonson has provided for *Firefly* a musical tapestry that weaves together many styles. At least four general categories of cues can be established

based on both style and dramatic function, all of which are introduced in “Serenity.” The first category is guitar- and fiddle-based music whose style can be described as a blending of folk, country-western, and even blues.²¹ The most prominent and memorable example is the opening theme song. Most of the occurrences of this type of music are associated with Mal, his actions and reactions, and with *Serenity* and its crew. At times this music incorporates gestures or performance styles associated with one type of instrument but played by another. For example, in “Serenity,” there are moments during the scenes on Persephone in which we can hear a guitar accompanied by a bouzouki that is playing in a manner similar to the banjo.²²

The second category has a more sinister quality. It is usually associated with threats to the well-being of the crew²³ and consists of ominous pedal points performed with low strings and/or low winds (these are sometimes synthesized, sometimes acoustical) and percussion. As has been noted before,²⁴ both the Reavers and the Alliance are accompanied by this type of sound, and it is even heard as Mal, Zoe (Gina Torres), and Jayne (Adam Baldwin) make their way to Badger’s office in the first episode. Edmonson has referred to this style of music as “clanging,”²⁵ but I prefer to call it “gonging.” It is just as likely to be soft and less energetic, and the timbre of many of these moments sounds like that produced by tubular bells or softly played gongs rather than more percussive and strident “clanging.” Nevertheless, a substantive distinction between music for the Alliance and music for other threatening figures or groups is that the former often includes orchestral winds and brass, and the version that accompanies the Reavers tends to be much more strident and “clanging.”

Piano-based music forms the third category. This is most closely associated with Inara and the Tam siblings, River and Simon, as I will discuss more fully below. The piano’s connection to Simon (Sean Maher) begins in “Serenity” and can be heard, for example, as he operates on Kaylee, when River (Summer Glau) is discovered, and while Simon tells the crew the Tams’ story.

Finally, music that could be broadly described as classical—both Western and non-Western—represents “civilization” generally and Inara in particular. Indeed, her presence on-screen even transforms the style of music performed by the guitar and violin, as these become more soulful and take on a light classical quality. “Serenity” once again provides

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examples. As Inara bathes and later when she comforts Shepherd Book (Ron Glass) at the end of the episode, she is accompanied by gentle guitar music, far different from the folksy style that accompanies Mal. Most of the “Asian” cues, discussed more critically above, tend to fit into this category. That they are frequently associated with Inara is consistent with the treatment of exoticism within the series, as I noted above, but it is also consistent with Inara’s relationship to civilization. Throughout the remainder of this essay, I will return to these four general categories of music as I highlight the various thematic and moral reversals in *Firefly*.

***Firefly* as a Western**

Numerous scholars have attempted to summarize the primary characteristics or concerns of the Western, which can be useful for considering the relationship of *Firefly* (and its musical score) to the genre. For example, James Cortese has argued that like heroic literature generally, Westerns have “warrior heroes, violent conflict, just causes, a circumscribed field of action, [and] a weapon that becomes an emblem of the larger struggle.”²⁶ *Firefly* has all these characteristics, including a weapon—the gun—that becomes the principal focus of action (actually and metaphorically) in the final four episodes of the series.²⁷

Carstensen states that Owen Wister in *The Virginian* (1902) “brought together the vital and durable ingredients of the American morality play: a western landscape, the cowboy hero, wrong-doers who would have to be destroyed violently to assure the establishment of law and order in the new land.”²⁸ Again, these characteristics abound in *Firefly*. The Western landscape is repeatedly evoked through the images that accompany the title sequence.²⁹ Furthermore, the scruffy landscape, complete with telegraph poles, through which the futuristic train travels in “The Train Job” would almost be at home in a 1950s Western, while the frontier settlements in “Safe” (F5), “Our Mrs. Reynolds” (F6), and “Heart of Gold” reveal an unusual technological diversity grounded in an essentially nineteenth-century environment.³⁰ The moon Whitefall, featured in “Serenity,” comes complete with whistling winds and screeching hawks (1:04:53),³¹ while the words of the series’ theme song reinforce the idea of the frontier as the “field of action.” One of the most poignant Western landscapes appears in one of the final scenes in the film *Serenity* (2005) during which

the camera first provides close-ups of small groups of the main characters, then pulls back to reveal a vast, empty region dominated by a mountain in the background that dwarfs the crew in the foreground.

Mal Reynolds is not a cowboy, but with his duster-like greatcoat and pistol with its holster tied around his leg he looks the part of the gunfighter,³² another prominent character from the Old West. Mal is also a war-weary veteran (a “browncoat”) of a civil war between the Independents and the Alliance, whose soldiers are always in gray. Many Western heroes and villains are likewise Civil War veterans.³³ Finally, wrongdoers are destroyed, or at least beaten and constrained. The gunfights in “Serenity” and “Heart of Gold” also could have been lifted from a 1950s film, yet it is unclear if law and order (or justice) will ever exist in Whedon’s frontier.

Many other lists of shared characteristics between Westerns and *Firefly* could be produced, and additional visual references, iconography, and conventional situations pointing to the frontier past and to the Western as a genre could be mentioned.³⁴ For the remainder of the essay, however, I will use a fairly simple list as a way to organize my discussion of the relationship between some of the more important thematic content of the series and the Western. Howard Movshovitz notes that in the Western, “‘Out there’ is the setting for . . . questions about race, the value of civilization, and the use of the land that still remain unresolved all these years after the West has largely disappeared.”³⁵ *Firefly* also foregrounds these questions, and I will address them (and their related musical categories) in the following sections in the order listed by Movshovitz.

Race and the Apparent Negation of Native Americans in *Firefly*

According to Donald Hoffman, Native Americans have normally been made to occupy the negative side of the four “structural oppositions that determine the Western myth,” which were first enumerated by Will Wright.³⁶ These are inside/outside society, good/bad, strong/weak, and civilization/wilderness.³⁷ In *Dances with Wolves* (1990), however, the unusually positive relationship between John Dunbar (Kevin Costner) and the Sioux “revalues” these oppositions. Nevertheless, the movie is not actually about Native Americans. It is, rather, “an initiation narrative

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about the spiritual growth of the white man, Dunbar,” albeit through the guidance of the Sioux.³⁸ Hoffman notes, “The Sioux as a nation perish, so that Dunbar can achieve his apotheosis.”³⁹

A similar, Native American–negating apotheosis occurs in “Journey’s End” (1994) from *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. Wesley Crusher (Wil Wheaton), unhappy with the direction of his life, returns to the *Enterprise* for a visit from Starfleet Academy. As the episode unfolds, he interferes in a conflict between the Federation, represented by Captain Picard (Patrick Stewart), and the Cardassian Union over the future of a group of Native Americans who have settled on Dorvan V, a planet slated to return to Cardassian control.⁴⁰ While seeking direction for his future, Wesley meets Lakanta (Tom Jackson), a Native American holy man who guides him on a vision quest.⁴¹ At the episode’s climax, Wesley uses his powers to pull himself out of time (rather than to stop the escalating violence). At the moment of Wesley’s apotheosis, Lakanta reveals that he is not a Native American holy man but rather the Traveler (Eric Menyuk), who has been waiting for several years for Wesley to join him on his transdimensional journeys.⁴²

Hoffman argues that in *Dances with Wolves*, the Sioux are not really presented as humans. They are “morphological actants” or “adjuvants” whose role has “been filled as adequately by fairies, frogs, and elfin cobblers, or, in recent cinema, by a variety of extraterrestrial gnomes from E. T. to Ewoks.”⁴³ This is also true of Lakanta, but, furthermore, he is not even really a Native American. Alien all along, he completely negates even the possibility of Native American agency in “Journey’s End.”

John Mihelich has written, “The portrayals (in Westerns), or perhaps the lack of alternative portrayals, reduce the meta-image of American Indians in popular culture to a finite and constrained set of experiences and potentials.”⁴⁴ Edward Buscombe concurs, stressing, further, that the concept of the American Indian in film has been frozen at the end of the nineteenth century. This gives the impression that Native American culture is ever stagnant or ever in decline. Although such Native American essentialism did not originate with film (it can be seen in nineteenth-century paintings and early twentieth-century photography),⁴⁵ it was perpetuated by film and television throughout the century. We see its lingering effect even in the well-meaning *Star Trek* franchise. In “The Paradise

Syndrome" (1966) from *Star Trek*, Native Americans are constructed as eternally primitive, in "Journey's End," as eternally victimized.⁴⁶

As a space Western, *Firefly* could have offered a futuristic vision of Native Americans based upon authentic knowledge of Native Americans and their cultures as they continue to evolve and be lived today. This would have been a powerful and welcome corrective to popular culture's persistently static representations of American Indians.⁴⁷ Instead, like the *Star Trek* franchise, *Firefly* unwittingly perpetuates the same stereotypes that fill many Westerns. Native Americans are erased visually from the series, but the thematic and narrative functions of film Indians remain. The Reavers, nomadic, cannibal-scavengers, inhabit the same geographical realm in the *Firefly* 'verse, beyond the very edge of "human" settlement; they have the same narrative role, as their predilection to attack those journeying too close to "the black" and their raid on the settlement at the beginning of the film *Serenity* (2005) demonstrate; and they occupy the same conceptual space in the main characters' understanding of their social universe on the frontier as American Indians occupied in the minds of most white characters in countless Westerns.⁴⁸ In the episode "Serenity," Simon calls them "men gone savage on the edge of space, killing," while Zoe says that they will "rape us to death, eat our flesh, and sew our skins into their clothing" (54:45ff).⁴⁹ We witness what the Reavers do to captured ships and crews in "Bushwhacked" (F3). Both Mal and Jayne state bluntly, "Reavers ain't men" (20:29ff), and Mal tells the Alliance commander that a youth who survived an attack will become "The Darkness" and turn into a Reaver himself (37:50).⁵⁰

It may be gruesome cultural differences rather than race or ethnicity that separate the Reavers from the main characters, but the underlying symbolic structure of the savage native on the outside of society, waiting to rape and kill in the wilderness between settlements, is retained. Lest we forget, American settlers addressed their fears of Indian attacks, kidnappings, sexual abuse, and scalping through written and visual means for centuries before the advent of motion pictures, and even ritual cannibalism on the part of Indians has been featured in film.⁵¹ Likewise, in some Westerns, including *Dances with Wolves*, the ultimate social sin was to "go native,"⁵² which is what the traumatized youth does in "Bushwhacked." It is telling that Mal offers the boy no quarter. In the end, he is simply eliminated.⁵³

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The music that accompanies the Reavers, which Edmonson has described as “disturbing,”⁵⁴ reinforces these associations between them and the American Indians of the Western. I have classified the Reavers’ music as part of the second category of *Firefly*’s musical styles. As such, it is far removed from the twangy, folksy style (the first category) that accompanies Mal, his ship, its crew, and their exploits. While not based on authentic Native American music, the Reavers’ music is reminiscent of the musical sounds created for Indians, both “good” and “bad,” in many Westerns.⁵⁵ In “Serenity,” bass drum hits and ominous, low string pedals accompany the first hint of trouble (52:56). Soon after, one can hear repetitive gonging on the first and second beats of what can be felt as five-beat measures. When Mal identifies the approaching ship as “Reavers” (53:37), the strings swell and percussion instruments begin to pound more energetically. This style of underscoring returns during the later confrontation (1:13:07ff).⁵⁶ Similarly, in “Bushwhacked,” the music that accompanies Simon as he enters the derelict ship, alone, is very creepy, reinforcing how “alien” the Reavers are. Soft gonging also returns (9:51ff).⁵⁷

Thus in *Firefly*, the “out there” of the frontier remains a site for consideration of difference. Although the Native American as a person and the American Indian as a cultural topos seem to have been removed, some Other has been put in the same narrative position. We are asked to accept that these Others are deeply alien and require elimination. Unfortunately, the series’ attempt to represent a (hopeful) blending of human cultures in the future (manifested by the veneer of Chinese cultural objects, signs, and language that is laid over the American Western elements) fails to offset this. We are left, therefore, with a future in which racial and cultural differences remain sources of potent conflict.

Inverting Civilization: The Fundamental Thematic Reversal in *Firefly*

One of the most important themes in many Westerns is the transformation of the frontier into a civilized world represented by the imposition of law and order and the arrival of education. Michael Böhnke has written that John Ford’s films are preoccupied with the relationship between law and violence. Various characters, situations, and events thus embody differing conceptions of the law, which can be summarized as western/natu-

ral/rural/customary versus eastern/codified/urban/rational. In Ford's *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962), Ransom Stoddard (James Stewart), an eastern-trained lawyer, brings the codified law west and opens the first school in Shinbone. But the new law still needs men like Tom Doniphon (John Wayne) who respect the power of social custom and will act violently against other violent men for the sake of the emerging society.⁵⁸

The civilizing process in the Western has been viewed both positively and negatively. Carstensen asserts that the actual settlers of the frontier "were mostly strangers to each other, but they were reasonably quick to establish and maintain order, aided lightly by the federal government."⁵⁹ Furthermore, nineteenth-century writers and politicians often celebrated them as "carriers of civilization."⁶⁰ Contrarily, Stanley Corkin interprets this "coming of order and civilization to formerly benighted places"⁶¹ as synonymous with territorial expansion necessitated by capitalism's continuous need for new, stable markets.⁶² Westerns "ask audiences to engage affectively in a view of the American nation that allows for acts of empire or hegemony to be seen as the expression of a rational and moral imperative that will ensure progress and promote the development of civilization."⁶³ It is a testimony to Whedon's knowledge of the Western and to his skill as a writer and director that this quotation could equally describe the brilliant manner in which he presents the backstory at the beginning of *Serenity* (2005). Whether or not Carstensen's claims about settlers are completely true, and whether or not we need to read the economics of the Western as specifically as does Corkin, settlers are featured prominently in Westerns. More importantly, their economic and security concerns are often at stake, even if they themselves are not the heroes of their stories.

The coming of civilization in *Firefly* is embodied by the Alliance. In the first episode, the main characters look over the concentrated food supplements issued by the Alliance government that they successfully salvaged. When Jayne asks what the Alliance was doing out so far, Kaylee sarcastically replies that it was "shining the light of civilization" (12:21).⁶⁴ The narrator at the opening of the movie repeats and elaborates on this notion that the Alliance brings appropriate, progressive civilization.⁶⁵ Undoubtedly, the Alliance (or at least its hegemonic Core) has superior technology and what seems to be a more refined culture compared to the frontier, and the episodes "Ariel" (F9) and "Trash" (F11) provide the viewer visual evidence of these differences between civilization and the

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wilderness.⁶⁶ Social, economic, and political differences between these two spheres are also embodied in the ongoing conflict between Inara, who supports unification and requires contact with elite society on the Core worlds, and Mal, who fought against unification, relies on the frontier's less regulated economy, and accuses Inara of using sophisticated (that is, manipulative) language in "Trash." All of this is well within the bounds of the genre, especially since women are also emblems in Westerns of the arrival of civilization.

Thus, in *Firefly* the traditional civilization-frontier dichotomy is in place, but we viewers are meant to understand that the Alliance is evil, and so, too, is the coming of its civilization. Like the Empire in *Star Wars*, and unlike the Federation in *Star Trek*, the Alliance represents a negation of freedom, even if it does uphold law and order. In all three series, the frontier is lawless and dangerous, but in *Firefly*, as in *Star Wars*, the center does not represent an ideal.⁶⁷ This is, therefore, the fundamental thematic reversal in *Firefly*.

Our affections are clearly supposed to be with the frontier people, at least those on *Serenity*. According to Whedon, these are the "fringe people" whom "the *Enterprise* would have just blown right past and never noticed."⁶⁸ Our affections are also meant to reside with the people of the settlements and frontiers in most midcentury Westerns, although it is important to remember that they are aiming typically toward greater levels of civilization, not fighting against it or trying to escape it.

The peculiar thing is that *Firefly* barely gives us reason to mistrust the Alliance. Granted, government scientists harmed River, but the "blue glove" agents seen in "Ariel" are more like the mad scientists of science fiction than the lawmen, corrupt or otherwise, of the Old West. Their willingness to frightfully and painfully kill the Alliance security personnel who apprehended River, Simon, and Jayne makes them more like rogue agents, who even show up in *Star Trek's* Federation or among Dr. Who's fellow Time Lords, than typical representatives of an evil Alliance. Likewise, Womack (Richard Burgi) in "The Message" (F12) and Jubal Early (Richard Brook) in "Objects in Space" (F14) are acting as corrupt free agents.⁶⁹ Womack betrays that he is acting outside of his jurisdiction by his unease at the thought of other Alliance soldiers becoming involved. And those nasty "feds" did help patch up Shepherd Book with their civi-

lized medicine and then let *Serenity* go, no questions asked. (Could Luke Skywalker have sought medical aid from a Star Destroyer?)

Not until the movie, with its dark revelation, parliamentary cover-up, and personification of the Alliance's power in the self-described "monster" Operative (Chiwetel Ejiofor), do we really begin to see the Core government as a genuine threat to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Interestingly, even then, the Operative says that nothing is as it seems. Mal is not "a plucky hero," and the Alliance "isn't some evil empire" (55:18ff).⁷⁰

Whether or not the Operative is correct, for the crew of *Serenity*, the coming of civilization and its laws is evil. But there is more to this thematic reversal. In *Firefly*, all kinds of authority and power are treated negatively, including power that comes with possession of wealth or that accompanies social custom. Even (supposed) professional expertise, as represented by River's teacher in *Serenity* (2005) and the careless doctor who nearly kills his patient in "Ariel," betrays itself as a threat to individual well-being. It is also telling that even Mal's authority is challenged, though not broken, when he pushes too hard against the safety of his crew or their perceptions of their natural, individual rights. Wash (Alan Tudyk), for example, initially refuses to leave Zoe's side in "Out of Gas" (F8),⁷¹ and Simon shows the ferocious facet of his character when confronting Mal in the film.

The episode "Shindig" (F4) highlights these issues.⁷² First, the whole notion of Inara going to a ball on Persephone is consistent with the kinds of events that represent the coming of civilization in Westerns. (The Hill Valley Festival in *Back to the Future Part III* shares the same function and was, furthermore, derisively referred to as a "shindig" by one of "Mad Dog" Tannen's men.⁷³) Second, Mal comes to the same dance because he needs to contact a potential client who wants to transport cattle off-world, around the restrictions of the civilizing Alliance. Third, "Shindig" is built upon old European and American literary, political, and philosophical tropes about the superiority of the natural over the artificial. The natural is represented by Kaylee and her innocent love of the beautiful things in the stores and at the ball, as well as by Mal's old-fashioned defense of what he considers to be Inara's honor; the artificial is represented by the mean-spirited young women at the ball who tease Kaylee about her store-bought dress and by the manner, attitude, and behavior of the stuffy,

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British-accented Atherton Wing (Edward Atterton). The episode leaves no doubt that we are meant to side with the uncouth, though more natural, people of the frontier.⁷⁴ Indeed, the high-class characters of “Shindig” were a more consistent and compelling representation of inhumanity, and thus more deserving of scorn, than were the Alliance’s naval officers in their handful of appearances in the series. Lest we miss how this episode connects to *Firefly*’s general theme of antiauthority that I outlined in the paragraph above, consider this exchange between Mal and Inara the night before the episode’s climactic duel:

Mal: “This duel is the result of the rules of your society, not mine.”

Inara: “You are always breaking the rules, no matter what society you’re in. . . .”

Mal: “You think following the rules will buy you a nice life, even if the rules make you a slave.” (34:16 ff)⁷⁵

Music in *Firefly* is frequently used as a marker of characters, although Edmonson has said that he used recurring instrumental “signatures” rather than recurring melodies for this function.⁷⁶ But musical moments whose style would place them in what I have defined as the second and fourth categories (sinister or threatening and classical, respectively) also frequently function as subtle codes that reinforce the civilization-bad thematic reversal of the series, whether we read civilization-bad as the Alliance in particular or all manner of social, cultural, and economic powers and authorities more generally.

Brassy fanfares and march-style themes with lush orchestral accompaniment regularly grace the opening sequences of Westerns, including *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* (1949), *Rio Grande* (1950), *Hondo* (1953), *The Magnificent Seven* (1960), *The Comancheros* (1961), *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962), and *The Cowboys* (1972).⁷⁷ Much science fiction also employs this kind of musical rhetoric. *Firefly* does not begin with brassy fanfares or a theme played by soaring, majestic-heroic orchestral strings, nor does it emulate *Shane* (1953), with its more relaxed cowboy theme set for winds and strings (but still introduced by brass).⁷⁸ All this is absent from *Firefly*, and with reason. Such music—“classical” in the broadest sense—belongs to the civilized world, as we hear when the string

quartet (accompanied by a dizi-like flute) performs at the ball in “Shindig.” This is foreign to the frontier, where we are more apt to hear Jayne play the guitar around a campfire (in the film), or witness folk dances accompanied by fiddles and pennywhistles (as in “Safe”). Furthermore, as *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* and *Rio Grande* demonstrate, march-like, heroic themes are inseparably linked to the military fanfares and trumpet calls of the (dominating) cavalry (or space fleet). Any hint of this sort of brassy orchestral music would be contrary to the nature of the fundamental thematic reversal of *Firefly*. In place of a triumphant (or triumphalist) orchestral introduction, we have the charming folk-country ballad. And like the ballad of its predecessor *High Noon* (1952), but unlike those of *The Man from Laramie* (1955), *El Dorado* (1967), and *The War Wagon* (1967), the *Firefly* ballad is left un-introduced and unadulterated by militaristic musical signs.⁷⁹ As such, it is “natural,” as are all examples of the first category.

Differences among the characters’ musical signatures also highlight the civilization-frontier dichotomy. Edmonson has called River’s music “ethereal,” but careful listening reveals that the piano is frequently associated with both Tam siblings, and sometimes with Inara (such as during “The Train Job”), as I briefly mentioned above. The piano is not used only in classical music in the “real world,” but in the soundtrack to *Firefly* it is usually deployed in opposition to the folksy fiddle and guitar. So, too, are the musical moments that masquerade as classical Chinese music, which also usually accompany the Tams or Inara. Given the former socioeconomic status of the Tam siblings and the ongoing status of Inara within the Core, this opposition of the piano and classical music generally (the Tams, Inara) to fiddle (*Mal/Serenity*) can be mapped onto the civilization-frontier dichotomy.⁸⁰

The episode “Safe” is rich with these codes, which signify characters and their emotional journeys over the course of the narrative. “Safe” begins eleven years earlier at the Tam estate. As we watch the two siblings interact, an Eastern-sounding ethnic flute—perhaps a dizi or xiao—with soft string accompaniment serves as a marker of wealthy Core living.⁸¹ As this flashback ends, we cut to *Serenity* as the ship prepares to land with its cargo of cattle. Mal once again orders Simon to keep River under control. There’s trading to be done, he says as he walks away, to the accompaniment of a fiddle (4:01). The camera then cuts to a group of hill folk, who will later kidnap Simon. Intriguingly, they are accompanied by ominous,

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slow and repetitive gonging as they watch *Serenity* land (4:12ff). The gonging and a hill man's pulling the skin off a strung-up rabbit signify the threat these men represent and also generate possible associations with Reavers and the idea of "going too native." Following the title sequence, we see the crew moving out into the fresh air with the cattle. The music that accompanies the start of this scene is folksy (5:19). Thus within the first five minutes of the episode, all the main plot elements have been anticipated, and all the important musical signifiers have sounded.

Two additional occurrences of piano music associated with Simon occur as he moves toward emotional resolution regarding all that he has given up for his sister. In the country store, Kaylee calls him on the carpet for criticizing *Serenity*: "And if that's what you think of this life, then you can't think much of them that choose it, can you?"⁸² As she finishes (10:04), the piano starts to play, thus drawing out the contrast between Simon's lost life (and his lingering preference for it) and life on *Serenity* (that is, on the frontier). His budding feelings for Kaylee and hers for him represent new possibilities, but he's not yet ready to embrace them. We hear the piano again during another flashback. Simon's father has bailed him out of jail. Their ensuing conversation shows that Simon's actions on behalf of River are motivated by familial love, but their father is concerned only with his own social status. As this dawns on Simon, the piano begins to play (34:56).⁸³

Simon finally chooses to put everything behind him when he willingly ascends the stake to be burned with River by the fanatics in the hill village at the end of the episode. Once rescued, Simon asks Mal why the crew came back for the Tams. Mal answers that they are part of the crew; this is accompanied by *Serenity*'s music, symbolic of the new family that the Tams have joined.⁸⁴

Given the distinctions between music representative of the Core and that of the frontier, several questions are suggested by the absence of traditional heroic music (which, if heard, would belong to the fourth category) and the presence of the twangy, country guitar and fiddle music (which belongs to the first category) when we see *Serenity*, her crew, and their exploits. Is Mal Reynolds a hero in any sense of the term? If he's unaccompanied by such music, does this mean that he is not? Or does it suggest that the heroic is itself an imposition of civilization, an emotionally seductive sign that is deployed to justify behavior deemed necessary to preserve law and order?

Questions about the Use of the Land: Violence, Property, and Heroism in *Firefly*

As noted in the previous section, the coming of civilization through the agency of settlers and the rise of law and order are central themes in the Western. While civilization advances on the frontier, however, competing values related to land use or, more broadly, the use of property, inevitably cause violence to erupt, first as a problem posed by the villain or enemy, then by the hero as a means to contain or destroy the threat.⁸⁵ In many Westerns, greedy cattlemen or Indians trying to prevent further encroachment on their lands threaten the property of settlers (enter the heroic gunman). In cowboy Westerns, the threat is theft or destruction of a herd of cattle, and the hero-cowboy(s) must protect the herd and safely deliver it to the rail town for transport east. If the threat is general lawlessness in the frontier town, the lawman must make things right. In all three cases, the hero is often an outsider himself, and once he fulfills his duties on behalf of the owner of the herd, or the settler, or the townspeople, he may move on.⁸⁶

Firefly plays upon these Western conventions in a number of different ways. For one thing, it is very difficult to find an uncomplicated hero in the series. Rita Parks defines the Western hero as “generally a loner” with a “melancholy past . . . whose future is tenuous and foreboding.” Nevertheless, he “is a man in command of things, persons, and events, handling them skillfully but with a certain aloofness that preserves his integrity. . . . He is almost always a man with one foot in the wilderness and the other in civilization, moving through life belonging to neither world.”⁸⁷ This sounds like Malcolm Reynolds. Yet for much of the series, Mal also behaves a great deal like the antihero of many 1960s Westerns, as a man whose “values, methods, and allegiances were more and more in direct opposition to those of the establishment.”⁸⁸ Mal is the antiestablishment loner, the rugged individual ranged against the solar community, willing to steal, kill, trick, outmaneuver, and break conventions in the interest of himself and, perhaps more honorably, his crew.

Additionally, the issue of property as a motivating factor in the stories is also complicated, as the lyrics of the series’ title song show.⁸⁹ On the one hand, “Take my love, take my land,” suggests that Mal Reynolds and his crew lack the kinds of property that have such importance in Westerns (homesteads, grazing lands, herds of cattle, gold mines) by

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virtue of the actions of the Alliance. On the other hand, “Take me out, to the black / tell them I ain’t comin’ back. / Burn the land and boil the sea” suggests that *Serenity*’s crew are restless and rootless in every possible sense.⁹⁰ This is not presented as a bad thing, since all that really matters is space itself, which represents freedom. (“I’m still free. / You can’t take the sky from me.”) *Serenity* traverses the frontier, but more importantly, as the representative of freedom, she makes possible rough-and-rugged individualism, the apparent highest good. That quality certainly exists in the traditional Western hero,⁹¹ but it is almost completely disassociated with the protection of property in *Firefly*.

In fact, most of the time, the crew of *Serenity* steals property rather than protects it. The excuse in “Ariel,” that the Alliance can always produce more drugs to replace the ones the crew will steal, is the flimsiest of rationales. More is at stake, however, than simply that the main characters of *Firefly* are petty thieves, as Inara notes time and again.⁹² Cortese argues that a kind of triangular relationship exists among the hero, settlers, and violence.⁹³ *Firefly* destroys this relationship because violence is rarely done on behalf of the frontier settlers we encounter. Indeed, in “Safe,” the crew is caught between the deceptions and dangers of both the high-class culture (the Alliance) and the low-class, religious fanaticism of at least one frontier community. As in the anti-Western, so in *Firefly*, “violence settles all the scores, but society is no better for it.”⁹⁴ *Serenity*’s crew members act violently, by and large, for their own ends rather than for justice or social transformation. This threatens to reduce the entire series to a battle between them and everyone else in the ‘verse.

There are moments, however, when Mal shows a more traditionally heroic side, as in “Heart of Gold.” This is the episode that depends the most upon the threat to property in the manner of the traditional Western. It also emulates those Westerns that have what Wright calls professional plots, which deal with groups of hired guns who are “heroes” only in the loosest of terms.⁹⁵ The difference is that Mal comes to care.

Nandi (Melinda Clarke), the madam of the bordello Heart of Gold, offers an assessment of their situation when the crew arrives, and this establishes the relationship between property and violence in this episode.

And you see the way we live here. Go into town, it’s the same. Some places come up rustic ‘cause they ain’t got more than the basics. Rance

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Burgess has money enough to build a city, a real community. Keeps people like this so he can play cowboy. Be the one with the best toys. Turn this moon into a *gorram* theme park. (10:12ff)⁹⁶

Although Rance (Frederic Lehne) is not shown to be connected directly with the Alliance, he stands in for detested authority and for civilization. When Mal and Inara go into town so that Mal can size up his opponent, they find Rance, his wife, and their hangers-on at the theater, a sign of the growth of civilization on the frontier, although no one seems to be paying attention to the Chinese shadow-puppet performance. The conversation Mal and Rance have over the latter's custom-built (and illegal) laser gun highlights both Rance's position of power and one of several thematic reversals in this episode. Rance is, for all intents and purposes, the Western lawgiver.⁹⁷ For example, he asserts his right to ownership of this particular weapon (seen in the center of the frame) on the strength of customary frontier law and traditional moral or natural law over and against the Core's rational and codified law, which, among other things, asserts the state's monopoly on sanctioned violence.

Rance: "I had that one [his laser gun] crafted special."

Mal: "Didn't think weapons such as this were generally legal. For private owner, I mean."

Mrs. Burgess: "My husband makes a distinction between legality and morality, Mr. Reynolds."

Mal: "I've said that myself."

Rance: "Bending one unjust law is a small thing, when it comes to protecting one's family." (11:47 ff)⁹⁸

Furthermore, Rance justifies his final attack on Heart of Gold as a defense of the "sanctity of fatherhood," "decency," and the "family" against the "decadent ways" of the inhabitants of the brothel (25:20ff).⁹⁹ But Rance is not the lawgiver in the traditional sense. He is not a Ransom Stoddard or Will Kane (Gary Cooper). Indeed, his skewed sense of moral outrage causes him to sexually humiliate Chari (Kimberly McCullough) in front of his followers in the town, and his use of a prostitute to produce an heir was the cause of all the conflict in the first place.¹⁰⁰

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The result of all this is that the townsfolk (Rance's followers), on whose behalf the Western hero most often acts in the Western, are now the source of the violence that threatens the evolution of the frontier (development of legitimately owned property). Contrarily, it is Nandi, the "whore," who justifies her actions based upon her rights to her property, which she has developed. Thus the prostitutes, often present in the Western but rarely occupying the moral center, receive the hero's aid and are cast in the role of those with a legitimate complaint.¹⁰¹ The ultimate reversal comes when Petaline, the prostitute who bore Rance's baby (Jonah), shoots Rance in order to keep her baby. The mother (or wife generally) and the prostitute are usually opposed in the Western. Here they are fused, made independent of men, and empowered to displace the lawgiver.¹⁰²

This creative manipulation of conventions in "Heart of Gold" is consistent with *Firefly's* general reversal regarding civilization as evil. Furthermore, that even the frontier settlement in "Heart of Gold" is a site of hostility and violence rather than the center of social evolution is consistent with the depiction of other frontier settlements in *Firefly*. It only goes to reinforce the sense that nearly all communities, except the crew of *Serenity* and the inhabitants of Heart of Gold, whom Inara refers to as a "family" (40:39),¹⁰³ are suspect.

Once again, the musical score reinforces the reversals of this episode and of the series as a whole. Rance is the figure of authority in the community, yet he is morally twisted, violent, and a threat to property. He and his men who invade *Serenity* are repeatedly coded with the sinister, repetitive drumming and gonging (music of category two) that mark threats to the crew, such as Reavers and violent hill men, in other episodes.¹⁰⁴ Likewise, when Mal and Rance meet at the theater, we are in the domain of civilization (that is, of evil), as signified by the use of "classical" music (in this case, music that sounds vaguely like classical Chinese music).

Intriguingly, Nandi's second speech about her property rights, in which she takes on the traditional role of the aggrieved male property owner, is accompanied by the piano.¹⁰⁵ This may suggest that she most fully represents the emergence of the good (true community), or it may simply be a marker of her character as a former Companion, since Inara also has piano accompaniment throughout this episode. Nevertheless, Mal and his music affirm Nandi's status as the rightful landowner. When

she finishes her speech, Mal says, “Well, Lady, I must say, you’re my kind of stupid,” to folksy accompaniment (14:13).¹⁰⁶ The final musical affirmation comes with the singing of “Amazing Grace” at her funeral. Both of these musical moments are examples of music from category one, which always accompanies characters with whom we are supposed to relate. (Significantly, Rance receives absolutely no on-screen memorial.) Thus Nandi, the prostitute, is constructed as the true lawgiver, the legitimate businesswomen, and the genuine defender of family on the frontier. Edmonson’s score supports this construction.

Conclusion

Some of the contrasts that I have drawn between *Firefly* and the Western might be minimized if we were to compare the series only to the anti-Westerns of the 1960s and 1970s, with their grittier social and psychological realism,¹⁰⁷ or to Westerns that have what Wright calls professional plots. After all, Malcolm Reynolds is not an agent of social stability or transformation. He does not play the role of the classical lawgiver or marshal, and he certainly lacks the latter’s “moral rectitude.”¹⁰⁸ He is, as Inara says, a petty crook, a “criminal,” as Shepherd Book insists in “Serenity” (1:21:03).¹⁰⁹ He is a reflection of our loss of confidence in the hero and in all sorts of authorities.¹¹⁰

Furthermore, Cortese has argued that Westerns are “highly articulated variations on a master myth of ascendancy that we have come to accept for the most part as just and true.”¹¹¹ *Firefly* runs counter to that myth: civilization, emblem of that ascendancy and represented by the Alliance, is depicted as bankrupt. We sympathize with the myth-resisting Mal Reynolds, even though—or perhaps because—he does not offer a compensatory myth, consoling moral platitudes, or faux-heroic twaddle. Indeed, at the conclusion of the episode “Serenity,” Mal and Simon, representatives of the series’ two very different worlds, take a moment to reflect on the episode’s events. Mal offers us lighthearted (if postmodern) resignation:

Simon: “You had the Alliance on you—criminals and savages. Half the people on this ship have been shot or wounded, including yourself, and you’re harboring known fugitives.”

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Mal: “Well, we’re still flyin’.”

Simon: “That’s not much.”

Mal: “It’s enough.”(1:25:08)¹¹²

If we followed this method and considered only the manner in which the hero and civilization are treated in *Firefly*, however, we would fail to take account of several other factors. Television Westerns have tended to differ from cinematic Westerns, not least in their treatment of heroes, and those of *Bonanza* and *Gunsmoke* provided a conceptual counterpoint to those of the anti-Westerns of the 1960s and 1970s. The values and conventions of the Westerns of the 1940s and 1950s—classical and transitional Westerns in Wright’s model—retained a hold on the American imagination during the 1960s and after. Those Westerns still attract audiences today, and their social and moral visions continue to inspire imitators.

For example, the captains of the *Star Trek* franchise are like the classical Western hero, acting with “clarity of purpose,” in a “decisive manner,” and with “unerring judgment.”¹¹³ Furthermore, they are adept at occupying the role of Western lawgiver in their “Western” episodes. In “Marauders,” Jonathan Archer (Scott Bakula) and his crew fulfill the function of the professional gunmen, like those of *The Magnificent Seven* (1960), and impose through the gun the rights of property against the caprice of banditry. In “North Star” (2003), however, Archer acts as the traditional lawgiver and guides humans and Skagarans toward a more just relationship. The episode ends, appropriately, with Bethany (Emily Bergl), the schoolteacher who used to teach the oppressed, Indian-like Skagarans in secret, now in front of all her students, human and otherwise, teaching the history of the Wright brothers with the help of equipment from *Enterprise*. Even Sheriff MacReady (Glenn Morshower), who had tried to stop Archer from interfering, stands expectantly at her door, listening.¹¹⁴

Clearly the most significant difference between Whedon’s approach to the space Western and that of the *Star Trek* franchise is their contrasting portrayal of heroes. One might argue that the *Star Trek* franchise has run its course for now on television because its moral earnestness no longer sustains a sense of dramatic realism. We may have become too cynical for the kinds of heroes that populate *Star Trek*’s frontiers, Western or otherwise.

Nandi, however, raises doubts that the moral meanings of *Firefly* can be neatly pigeonholed based solely on its treatment of the hero and of civilization. Nandi and her “family” settled the land, created a community in spite of their differences, asserted their rights to life, liberty, and happiness, and even took up arms to defend their community (with the aid of the crew of *Serenity*). Their momentary hero, Mal Reynolds, shares characteristics with the 1960s anti-Western hero, and they themselves are not typical members of the good society in Wright’s classical Westerns. Nevertheless, their community embodies the values—family, law, business, peace—of the good society in the classical Western of the 1940s and 1950s.¹¹⁵ This has to be one of the series’ most intriguing manipulations of the Western’s conventions. The result is that Nandi’s family-society, like the frontier settlements that Jonathan Archer assists, still holds on to the promise of goodness, growth, and civility.

Firefly as a whole may offer a pessimistic view of civilization. It may demonstrate that we no longer believe that any one individual can bring about the good society. But for a moment, in “Heart of Gold,” we realize that we still hope for that good society. We still dream a frontier myth and wish to be a pioneer people.

Notes

1. Vernon Carstensen, “Making Use of the Frontier and the American West,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 13, no. 1 (1982): 16.
2. Howard Movshovitz, “The Still Point: Women in the Westerns of John Ford,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 7, no. 3 (1984): 68.
3. Rita Parks, *The Western Hero in Film and Television: Mass Media Mythology* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Research Press, 1982), 1.
4. E. Anthony Rotundo, review of *Westerns: Making the Man in Fiction and Film*, by Lee Clark Mitchell, *Journal of American History* 84, no. 2 (1992): 707.
5. For a brief history of cinematic Westerns and an assessment of their popularity at midcentury, see Eliza Franklin, “Westerns, First and Lasting,” *Quarterly of Film, Radio and Television* 7, no. 2 (1952): 109–15. Stanley Corkin argues that Westerns were popular from the 1940s through the 1960s because they provided a “conceptual bridge between frontier mythology and Cold War imperatives.” Corkin, “Cowboys and Free Markets: Post-World War II Westerns and U.S. Hegemony,” *Cinema Journal* 39, no. 3 (2000): 70.

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6. Mark Busby, review of *Back in the Saddle Again: New Essays on the Western*, by Edward Buscombe and Roberta E. Pearson, eds., *Western Historical Quarterly* 30, no. 4 (1999): 520.

7. Carstensen, "Making Use of the Frontier," 12. See Parks, *Western Hero*, 129–31, for a discussion of television Westerns during the latter half of the 1950s, and see appendix A for a listing of all television Westerns in the United States between 1948 and 1972.

8. Both Lucy (Lucille Ball) and Ricky (Desi Arnaz) appear mesmerized (yet fearful) of the "bloodcurdling" tales that they read from a book of Indian stories. Lucy is later convinced that two white actors—dressed as Indians—who mistakenly arrive at her door for an audition intend to harm her and Ethel (Vivian Vance). (Ironically, one of these white men is called "Herman" in the scene itself.) These situations are comic mirrors of Indian tropes in dramatic films. Furthermore, the later "Indian" musical segments, performed by Ricky, Fred (William Frawley), Ethel, and Lucy, as well as the fact that it is white men (Frank Gerstle and Richard Reeves) who audition to play Indians, reflect the real-life misrepresentations of actual Native Americans and their culture in film at midcentury. "The Indian Show," *I Love Lucy*, DVD, dir. William Asher (1953; Hollywood, Calif.: Paramount Pictures, 2004). For Wally (Tony Dow) and the Beaver (Jerry Mathers), Native Americans are objects of their childhood fantasies, characters to be emulated in neighborhood games and imagined only as fierce warriors fighting battles in an empty lot across the street. "Next-Door Indians," *Leave It to Beaver*, DVD, dir. Norman Tokar (1958; Universal City, Calif.: Universal Studios Home Entertainment, 2005).

9. Parks, *Western Hero*, 92. For discussion and still images, see Gary Johnson, "The Phantom Empire," *Images: A Journal of Film and Popular Culture* 4, www.imagesjournal.com/issue04/infocus/phantomempire.htm.

10. "Marauders," *Star Trek: Enterprise*, DVD, dir. Mike Vejar (2002; Hollywood, Calif.: Paramount Pictures, 2005).

11. *Star Wars Episode IV: A New Hope*, DVD, dir. George Lucas (1977; Beverly Hills, Calif.: Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2004); *Star Wars Episode II: Attack of the Clones*, DVD, dir. George Lucas (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2002).

12. Whedon describes his inspiration for *Firefly* in a selection among the bonus materials on the DVD release of the film *Serenity* (2005). See "Future History: The Story of Earth That Was," *Serenity*, DVD, dir. Joss Whedon (Universal Studios, Calif.: Universal Studios, 2005).

13. Parks defines the Western as "a visual and verbal story form depicting a repertoire of situations in a frontier setting and involving the particular types of characters consensually associated with those situations and that setting." *Western*

Hero, 28. Contrarily, John Cawelti has argued, "A Western that does not take place in the West, near the frontier, at a point in history when social order and anarchy are in tension . . . is simply not a Western." Cawelti, *The Six-Gun Mystique* (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Press, 1971), 31, quoted in Parks, *Western Hero*, 18. *Firefly* is not set in the actual American West, but it is set in a frontier that is plagued by anarchy and that consistently looks like the American West of film. In my opinion, these aspects satisfy Cawelti's emphasis on location in the Western, and the series certainly satisfies Parks's more liberal definition. For a thoughtful discussion of the *Star Trek* franchise through the late 1990s, with consideration of how its series draw upon themes of the Western, including conflicts between the individual and society and between social order and individual freedom, see John Wagner and Jan Lundeen, *Deep Space and Sacred Time: Star Trek in the American Mythos* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1998), 125–27, 174–82.

14. Interestingly, the duds that Doc Brown (Christopher Lloyd) sends Marty McFly (Michael J. Fox) wearing into the past and those that the Doctor's companion Steven Taylor (Peter Purves) wears are similarly grotesque caricatures of cowboy outfits. *Back to the Future Part III*, DVD, dir. Robert Zemeckis (1990; Universal City, Calif.: Universal Studios, 2002). For a still from *Doctor Who* "The Gunfighters," see www.bbc.co.uk/doctorwho/classic/episodeguide/gunfighters/detail.shtml.

15. "Future History," *Serenity*, DVD.

16. See the liner notes from Greg Edmonson and Joss Whedon, *Joss Whedon's Firefly: Original Television Soundtrack*, © 2005 by Varese Sarabande Records, 302-066-699-2, compact disc; and Helen San, "For the Love of Firefly: A Conversation with Composer Greg Edmonson," *Tracksounds: The Film Music Experience* (February 2004), www.tracksounds.com/specialfeatures/interviews/interview_greg_edmonson.htm.

17. This track can be heard on Greg Edmonson and Joss Whedon, *Joss Whedon's Firefly: Original Television Soundtrack*.

18. "Serenity, Parts 1 and 2," *Firefly*, DVD, dir. Joss Whedon (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Twentieth Century Fox, 2003).

19. "The Train Job," *Firefly*, DVD, dir. Joss Whedon (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Twentieth Century Fox, 2003, 10:40 ff).

20. This is the first part of the track "Inara's Suite," from Edmonson and Whedon, *Joss Whedon's Firefly: Original Television Soundtrack*. See also the printed score in Greg Edmonson and Joss Whedon, *Joss Whedon's Firefly: Music from the Original Television Soundtrack* (Milwaukee, Wis.: Hal Leonard Corp., 2005).

21. Helen San even refers to "bluegrass" elements in the music in her interview with Greg Edmonson. See San, "For the Love of *Firefly*."

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22. "Serenity, Parts 1 and 2," *Firefly*, DVD, 16:47 ff. The liner notes to Edmonson and Whedon, *Joss Whedon's Firefly: Original Television Soundtrack* provide a listing of the various instruments used for the soundtrack.

23. Helen San makes this same point in "For the Love of *Firefly*."

24. See San, "For the Love of *Firefly*."

25. See San, "For the Love of *Firefly*."

26. James Cortese, "Bourgeois Myth and Anti-Myth: The Western Hero of the Fifties," *SubStance* 5, no. 15 (1976): 122.

27. Although other episodes featured guns and gunfights, the gun as an object motivating and resolving actions intensifies in the last four episodes, "Trash" (F11), "The Message" (F12), "Heart of Gold" (F13), and "Objects in Space" (F14). It is the focus of our attention and dominates several shots and scenes in "Heart of Gold," including at the beginning of the episode when Mal is cleaning his weapons at the dining area table, has an exchange with Inara that sets up the subsequent actions of the episode, and then aims a gun at us as the scene ends (3:45); when Mal and Rance Burgess are sizing each other up while discussing Rance's high-tech and custom-made laser gun; and when Nandi, the madam of the bordello Heart of Gold, and Mal look over her collection of pistols as a prelude to sexual intimacy. Nandi even says, "I've been waiting for you to kiss me since I showed you my guns" (22:58). See "Heart of Gold," *Firefly*, DVD, dir. Thomas J. Wright (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2003). In "Objects in Space," the bounty hunter, Jubal Early, also points his gun at Simon, but we viewers see it aimed at us. (The movie again has a shot of Mal pointing a gun at the viewer.) In contrast to the gun's central role in "Heart of Gold," in "Objects in Space," River insists that her crewmates take back *Serenity* without using guns. See "Objects in Space," *Firefly*, DVD, dir. Joss Whedon (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2003).

28. Carstensen, "Making Use of the Frontier," 10–11.

29. The faint image of a gun also appears superimposed on *Serenity* during the beginning of the series' title sequence.

30. "The Train Job," *Firefly*, DVD; "Safe," *Firefly*, DVD, dir. Michael Grossman (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Twentieth Century Fox, 2003); "Our Mrs. Reynolds," *Firefly*, DVD, dir. Vondie Curtis Hall (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Twentieth Century Fox, 2003); "Heart of Gold," *Firefly*, DVD.

31. "Serenity, Parts 1 and 2," *Firefly*, DVD.

32. The cover of the first case of the complete series DVD set has an image of Mal that certainly accentuates his gunfighter-like appearance.

33. The gunfighter is often a veteran unable to readapt to civilian life. Parks, *Western Hero*, 47.

34. These would include, for example, the clutter of obsolete nineteenth-century gadgets in Badger's office in "Serenity" (F1) and the painting of the gun-fighter in the hallway of the lodging seen over Inara's shoulder in "Shindig" (F4) (28:42). Other conventional situations would include the saloon brawl in "The Train Job" (F2) and the attempted ambush of a horse-drawn wagon in "Our Mrs. Reynolds" (F6). See "Serenity, Parts 1 and 2," *Firefly*, DVD; "Shindig," *Firefly*, DVD, dir. Vern Gillum (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Twentieth Century Fox, 2003); "The Train Job," *Firefly*, DVD; and "Our Mrs. Reynolds," *Firefly*, DVD.

35. Movshovitz, "Still Point," 68.

36. Donald Hoffman, "Whose Home on the Range? Finding Room for Native Americans, African Americans, and Latino Americans in the Revisionist Western," *MELUS* 22, no. 2 (1997): 47. For short but excellent overviews of the portrayal of Native Americans in Westerns, see John A. Price, "The Stereotyping of North American Indians in Motion Pictures," *Ethnohistory* 20, no. 2 (1973): 153–71; and Jacqueline K. Greb, "Will the Real Indians Please Stand Up," in *Back in the Saddle: Essays on Western Film and Television Actors*, ed. Gary A. Yoggy (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 1998), 129–44.

37. For Wright's original discussion, see his *Six Guns and Society: A Structural Study of the Western* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1975), 49–59.

38. Hoffman, "Whose Home on the Range?" 47.

39. Hoffman, "Whose Home on the Range?" 48.

40. This development in the history of the *Star Trek* universe provides the basis for the emergence of the Maquis in later *Star Trek* series and the creation of the wise Native American character Chakotay (Robert Beltram), first officer in *Star Trek: Voyager*.

41. For discussion of New Age appropriations of Native American spirituality in film and television, see Wagner and Lundeen, *Deep Space and Sacred Time*, 180; and Edward Buscombe, *'Injuns!' Native Americans in the Movies* (Bodmin, Cornwall: Reaktion Books, 2006), 11–12, 168–69.

42. "Journey's End," *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, DVD, dir. Corey Allen (1994; Hollywood, Calif.: Paramount Pictures, 2002).

43. Hoffman, "Whose Home on the Range?" 48.

44. John Mihelich, "Smoke or Signal? American Popular Culture and the Challenge to Hegemonic Images of American Indians in Native American Film," *Wicazo sa Review* 16, no. 2 (2001): 131.

45. Buscombe, *'Injuns!'* 11, 18, 66–81.

46. "Paradise Syndrome," *Star Trek*, DVD, dir. Jud Taylor (1968; Hollywood, Calif.: Paramount Pictures, 2005). For discussion of the construction of the Native Americans as primitive and Kirk as the wise, white benefactor

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in “The Paradise Syndrome,” see Wagner and Lundeen, *Deep Space and Sacred Time*, 150, 177–78.

47. Mihelich, “Smoke or Signal?” 133.

48. In the same way, in the episode “North Star” (2003) from *Star Trek: Enterprise*, Jonathan Archer (Scott Bakula) and his crew discover a group of humans living on a distant planet in the same manner as their American frontier ancestors had on Earth centuries before. Although there are no Native Americans among them, the “Skags” (from “Skagaran”) are the descendants of the aliens who kidnapped their ancestors and function within the narrative like American Indians. Skags are treated harshly, enjoy few rights, and are relegated to the wilderness beyond the community of settlers. Laws exist to mediate contact (and presumably to preclude miscegenation). See “North Star,” *Star Trek: Enterprise*, DVD, dir. David Straiton (Hollywood, Calif.: Paramount Pictures, 2005).

49. “Serenity, Parts 1 and 2,” *Firefly*, DVD.

50. “Bushwacked,” *Firefly*, DVD, dir. Tim Minear (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2003).

51. See Michael Mann’s *The Last of the Mohicans* (1992).

52. This issue is addressed several times in Buscombe, *Injuns!* See for example 130.

53. The origins of the Reavers, revealed in the movie, do not alter this layering of the Reaver onto the Indian. Some Native American tribes developed only after their encounters with Europeans; others embraced entirely new social and cultural patterns—such as hunting for buffalo on horseback—only after the arrival of Europeans in North America. See Buscombe, *Injuns!* 26–27.

54. San, “For the Love of *Firefly*.”

55. For example, in *The Man from Laramie*, both enemy Indians and friendly ones are accompanied by the same repetitive drumming, suggesting that a fundamental divide exists between whites and all Native Americans. *The Man from Laramie*, DVD, dir. Anthony Mann (1955; Culver City, Calif.: Columbia TriStar Home Video, 1999).

56. “Serenity, Parts 1 and 2,” *Firefly*, DVD.

57. “Bushwacked,” *Firefly*, DVD.

58. Michael Böhnke, “Myth and Law in the Films of John Ford,” *Journal of Law and Society* 28, no. 1 (2001): 47–63.

59. Carstensen, “Making Use of the Frontier,” 6.

60. Carstensen, “Making Use of the Frontier,” 7.

61. Corkin, “Cowboys and Free Markets,” 78.

62. Corkin, “Cowboys and Free Markets,” 68–70.

63. Corkin, “Cowboys and Free Markets,” 73.

64. “Serenity, Parts 1 and 2,” *Firefly*, DVD.

65. *Serenity*, DVD.

66. "Ariel," *Firefly*, DVD, dir. Allan Kroeker (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Twentieth Century Fox, 2003); "Trash," *Firefly*, DVD. The differences between the Core and the frontier are reminiscent of technological and cultural contrasts between Coruscant and Tatooine in the *Star Wars* galaxy.

67. Bland uniformity is a mark of the interplanetary states in these series, and Whedon may have intended the gray uniforms of the Alliance naval personnel to remind viewers of the similar uniforms worn by Imperial officers in the *Star Wars* films. In "Future History: The Story of Earth that Was," *Serenity*, Whedon states that the frontier reminds him of the *Millennium Falcon*, so it is possible that *Star Wars*-inspired design elements crept into *Firefly*. When I first watched *Firefly*, I kept thinking, "These could be the adventures of Han Solo." That *Star Wars* character, like Mal Reynolds, is strikingly similar to a Western gunfighter, especially given his exchange with Greedo in the (in)famous cantina scene in the original *Star Wars* movie.

68. See "Future History," *Serenity*, DVD.

69. "The Message," *Firefly*, DVD; "Objects in Space," *Firefly*, DVD.

70. *Serenity*, DVD.

71. "Out of Gas," *Firefly*, DVD, dir. David Solomon (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Twentieth Century Fox, 2003).

72. "Shindig," *Firefly*, DVD.

73. *Back to the Future Part III*, DVD.

74. It is interesting to watch Mal glide between these two worlds when he wishes to. Compare, for example, how he talks to Kaylee in "Out of Gas," matching her homespun mode, with his manner in "Heart of Gold" with both Rance Burgess and Nandi.

75. "Shindig," *Firefly*, DVD.

76. San, "For the Love of *Firefly*."

77. *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon*, DVD, dir. John Ford (1949; Burbank, Calif.: Warner Home Video, 2002); *Rio Grande*, DVD, dir. John Ford (1950; Santa Monica, Calif.: Artisan Home Entertainment, 2002); *The Magnificent Seven*, DVD, dir. John Sturges (1960; Santa Monica, Calif.: MGM Home Entertainment, 2001); *The Comancheros*, DVD, dir. Michael Curtiz (1961; Beverly Hills, Calif.: Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2003); *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, DVD, dir. John Ford (1962; Hollywood, Calif.: Paramount Pictures, 2001); and *The Cowboys*, DVD, dir. Mark Rydell (1972; Burbank, Calif.: Warner Home Video, 1998).

78. *Shane*, DVD, dir. George Stevens (1953; Hollywood, Calif.: Paramount Pictures, 2000).

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79. *High Noon*, DVD, dir. Fred Zinnemann (1952; Santa Monica, Calif.: Artisan Home Entertainment, 2002); *The Man from Laramie*, DVD (1999); *El Dorado*, DVD, dir. Howard Hawks (1967; Hollywood, Calif.: Paramount Pictures, 2000); and *The War Wagon*, DVD, dir. Burt Kennedy (1967; Universal City, Calif.: Universal Studios, 2003).

80. In the episode “Objects in Space,” the bounty hunter, Jubal Early, is consistently accompanied by eerie, low orchestral winds, which we can think of as “classical” again. The brilliant moment toward the end of the episode when Mal shows up unexpectedly, accompanied by his twangy musical signature, once again highlights the opposition of classical instrumental sounds to folksy ones.

81. The liner notes of Edmonson and Whedon, *Joss Whedon’s Firefly: Original Television Soundtrack* refer to the use of “ethnic winds,” but specific instruments are not listed.

82. “Safe,” *Firefly*, DVD.

83. “Safe,” *Firefly*, DVD.

84. A similar sort of exchange with similar musical coding occurs between Inara and Mal at the end of “Shindig.”

85. See Wright, *Six Guns and Society*, 5–6. For a different reading of the “clash of cares” (11) that dominates the Western, see Peter A. French, *Cowboy Metaphysics: Ethics and Death in Westerns* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997).

86. In Westerns with what Wright calls the vengeance plot, the hero was a member of society, became alienated from it, but reenters society as part of the resolution of the plot crisis. In the transitional plot, the hero represents the older (and better) values of society that have been abandoned by settlers or townspeople. See Wright, *Six Guns and Society*, chapter 6.

87. Parks, *Western Hero*, 58.

88. Parks, *Western Hero*, 100.

89. See for example the opening title sequence in “Serenity, Parts 1 and 2,” *Firefly*, DVD.

90. The television Western normally depended for continuity on a more settled existence for the hero, as is seen in *Bonanza* and *Guns Smoke*. Parks, *Western Hero*, 136, 141–48. Whedon is able to approximate this through *Serenity* itself, which provides the crew with both a permanent home and the means to be restless.

91. Parks notes that the “conflict between the individual and the group” is central to the Western and has very old roots in American literature, with James Fennimore Cooper’s *Leatherstocking Tales* as its basis. She also refers to the composite Westerner as a “self-reliant individualist,” “politically intransigent yet holding strong feelings of group responsibility,” who makes “independent decisions regarding law and order” and is “suspicious” of intellect. *Western Hero*, 37.

92. See for example "Heart of Gold," *Firefly*, DVD, 3:06.
93. Cortese, "Bourgeois Myth," 126.
94. Cortese, "Bourgeois Myth," 130.
95. For a full discussion of such plots, see Wright, *Six Guns and Society*, 85–88. Heroes in these movies are paid gunmen who "are no longer defending social values." *Six Guns and Society*, 170.
96. "Heart of Gold," *Firefly*, DVD.
97. Note that at the beginning of the episode, Nandi tells Rance, "You don't get gone, we'll be well within our rights to drop you." Rance replies, "The only rights you got are the ones I give you." "Heart of Gold," *Firefly*, DVD, 1:11 ff.
98. "Heart of Gold," *Firefly*, DVD.
99. "Heart of Gold," *Firefly*, DVD.
100. Rance orders the prostitute to get on her knees, then tells his cheering followers that this shows them all "what a woman is to a man" ("Heart of Gold," 25:43). "Fatherhood," it seems, has become synonymous merely with sexual domination of available females.
101. Indeed, when discussing their situation after Rance leaves, one woman says to Nandi that even if there were someone strong enough to stand up to Rance, "who'd help us?" "Heart of Gold," *Firefly*, DVD, 2:20.
102. In the episode "Trash," Inara (the prostitute) defeats Saffron (the "wife") in a humorous example of this reversal. Unfortunately, this scene lacks substantive musical underscoring.
103. "Heart of Gold," *Firefly*, DVD.
104. See for example 1:11, 25:20, 29:54, 29:54, and 34:28 in "Heart of Gold," *Firefly*, DVD.
105. After being advised by Mal to flee with him and his crew, Nandi begins, "Captain Reynolds, it took me years to cut this piece of territory out of other men's hands." "Heart of Gold," *Firefly*, DVD, 13:39.
106. "Heart of Gold," *Firefly*, DVD.
107. Cortese, "Bourgeois Myth," 123.
108. Parks, *Western Hero*, 55. Shepherd Book comes closest to the Marshal in his ability to wield weapons on behalf of others—with a remarkable show of restraint—while also maintaining his consistent ethical standards.
109. "Serenity, Parts 1 and 2," *Firefly*, DVD.
110. Parks has stated that the Western hero must reflect "the audience's own taste in lifestyle, morality, and attitudes toward situations encountered." Changes in the Western hero in film and television since the late 1950s therefore reflect "shifting values of the society and audience which help to create and sustain him." *Western Hero*, 2.
111. Cortese, "Bourgeois Myth," 125.

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112. "Serenity, Parts 1 and 2," *Firefly*, DVD.
113. Parks, *Western Hero*, 57.
114. "North Star," *Star Trek: Enterprise*, DVD. Archer simply follows the lead of Captain Kirk (William Shatner). In "The Spectre of the Gun" (1968), members of the crew refuse to participate in a lethal reenactment of the gunfight at the OK Corral. (Their technologically superior captors, the Melkotians, intend them to play the roles of the Clanton gang who must be eliminated by Doc Holliday and the Earps.) Through Spock, Kirk "unmasks" their captors as "lawmen" and so reveals, yet again, that he is the emissary of a more morally enlightened planet; he is the true lawgiver to the beings who once seemed more enlightened. See "Spectre of the Gun," *Star Trek*, DVD, dir. Vincent McEveety (1968; Hollywood, Calif.: Paramount Pictures, 2004), 47:23 ff.
115. Wright, *Six Guns and Society*, 165.

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CHAPTER TEN

“MY RIFLE’S AS BRIGHT AS MY SWEETHEART’S EYES”

Joss Whedon’s *Firefly* and the Songs of the Clancy Brothers

Linda Jencson



This chapter explores the unlikely relationship between a mid-twentieth-century folk era band of Irish musicians and a twenty-first-century American science fiction television series set in the twenty-fifth century. My interest in linking these disparate times, places, and genres began in 2006 on the way back from the Slay-age II Conference on the Whedonverses, where I had presented a paper on the cult television series *Firefly*. I happened to pop a Clancy Brothers and Tommy Makem recording into my car stereo. As I drove down the road, images of *Firefly* and its spin-off film *Serenity* danced through my head—to the tune of an Irish folk music soundtrack that predated the series and film by over forty years.

To my surprise and delight, the values expressed, and even the imagery used to represent them—heroism, manhood, rebellion, equality, and political independence—are a near exact fit.

A few months later, I found confirmation of a *Firefly*–Clancy Brothers connection at the late-night *Firefly* fan party at Atlanta’s annual science fiction convention, DragonCon. The acoustic fiddle, guitar, and mandolin folk group at the “shindig” played a mix of tunes from the series, traditional Celtic folksongs, filk (fan) songs about the series, and—Clancy Brothers covers!¹ Significantly, members of the audience requested additional Clancy songs. It was clear that many *Firefly* fans in attendance knew the band, the Bedlam Bards, and were familiar with their repertoire,



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a collection of songs that overlaps and revives the music of the Clancys and Tommy Makem.² Yet none of the *Firefly* fans looked old enough to remember the Clancy Brothers in their heyday, nor to have one of their original vinyl LPs. How is it that the fandom of a 1960s group of Irish musicians who glorified the Irish past overlaps the fandom of a science fiction television series and film from the 2000s set in the distant future?

Since it is clear that the Clancy Brothers did not sing about outer space or *Firefly*-class starships, we'll begin to search for a connection by asking the question, Is there something Irish about *Firefly/Serenity*?³ In fact, we'll cast our net even broader and begin by looking for relevant Irishness in *Firefly/Serenity* creator Joss Whedon's earlier works, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel*. Donna Potts discusses Whedon's use of Irish versus English ethnicity in both series when the Irish vampire Angel clashes with the English vampire Spike.⁴ Potts and Nicole McClure discuss Whedon's use of Irish versus English ethnicity in clashes between Angel and Spike and Wesley, who is also English.⁵ The authors find that Whedon uses ethnic identity to explore issues of class, colonial domination, and resistance.

Whereas gender inequity was the primary issue in the Buffyverse, Whedon's use of Irish themes to touch lightly upon colonialism in *Buffy* and *Angel* foreshadows his use of Irish music and ethnic tropes in *Firefly* and *Serenity* to explore colonialism and class as their major issues. His perspective is unrepentantly in sympathy with the colonized. As Potts sees it, part of the vampire Angel's desire to dominate and humiliate the English vampire Spike is in retaliation for British wrongs against the Irish. Angel, whose name before his undeath was Liam, carries his ethnicity in a variety of forms, from the Claddagh ring he gives his American beloved, Buffy, to the elaborate tattoo of a page from the Book of Kells that he wears on his body.

Potts and McClure also point to blatant ethnic rivalry between Angel and the very English Wesley Wyndham-Pryce, in an *Angel* episode when both lose most of their memories and are returned to their teen personalities (and early unexamined ethnic prejudices) prior to Liam's development into the vampire Angel. As "young" Liam says to Wesley in "Spin the Bottle" (A4.6), "You English pig. We never wanted you in Ireland. We don't want you now."⁶

I might add that the half-human bracken demon in the *Angel* series, Doyle, is also Irish. His obvious working class / street origins create tension and sympathy as he falls for the upper-class, elitist Cordelia. In “Hero” (A1.9), they share their first kiss as he dies, martyred to liberate families of harmless, persecuted demons, much like himself. Their situation aboard a ship bound for foreign ports where they hope to find acceptance and a home recalls the forced immigration of the Irish to America, fleeing British persecution and famine in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The point for our inquiry here is that Joss Whedon has shown not only familiarity with the Irish colonial situation, but active political concern for it, through repeated reference to it in previous works. My thesis is that although he does not make direct reference to Ireland through Irish characters and accents, Whedon is still doing Ireland in *Firefly* and *Serenity*. Here he’s exposing the faults of colonialism with a greater depth than ever before; and whether consciously or not, fans of *Firefly/Serenity* overlap the fandom of the Clancy Brothers because the same anticolonial rebel ethos is promoted in both places.⁷

Firefly is set in the twenty-fifth century. “Earth That Was” is used up and evacuated. Humankind has colonized a solar system of planets and moons by “terraforming” artificial earths. The Central Planet Alliance constitutes a core that dominates and extracts resources from the peripheral planets. The peripheral colonists fought a war for independence, which they lost at the battle of Serenity Valley, twelve years before events in the opening episode. Two main characters, the captain and first officer of the space cargo ship *Serenity* (named for the battleground), are survivors of the losing Independents’ army, the Browncoats.⁸ Their crew of skilled tradesmen/women from the peripheral planets is accompanied by a high-ranking prostitute who serves elite clients at core and peripheral ports. She is the captain’s love, but very much in keeping with the romantic and chivalric tropes that Whedon harks back to, she is not his lover.

Serenity is a pirate ship smuggling needed supplies to the hungry, exploited inhabitants of peripheral worlds. The crew and the ship’s one passenger are joined in the first episode by a mysterious, celibate “shepherd” clergyman and the Tams, a brother and sister of upper-class origins, on the run from Alliance operatives. In each episode *Serenity* arrives on

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a different planet, where viewers encounter the dire poverty and slavlike conditions of hardworking colonists on the periphery, contrasted with the arrogant leisure and indifference of citizens in the Alliance economic and political core. In the series *Firefly*, the heroes rob from the rich (and sell to the poor), protecting various innocents along the way. But in the film *Serenity*, the crew reverts to the captain's revolutionary ways, striking a serious blow against Alliance domination by risking life and limb (two main characters die) to spread seditious information about Alliance activities throughout the Alliance system. This is not a law-and-order kind of show; like the Irish Republican Army sympathies of the Clancy Brothers, *Firefly* and *Serenity* promote rebellion.⁹

Let's be clear—everything Whedon does is a metaphor for conditions in our own world. In "Future History: The Story of Earth That Was," Whedon tells us, "It's a vision of the world more or less as it is today . . . because that's what's going on right now."¹⁰ Social scientists such as myself—I am a cultural anthropologist—even use the same terms, "core" and "periphery," to describe the powerful nations of our world whose military domination allows them to consume the products of other lands, contrasted with the powerless nations that grow, mine, and manufacture what the core consumes, while consigned to poverty themselves; this is colonialism in a nutshell. And Ireland was the first colony of England in the capitalist era; the Irish suffered horrendous discrimination, exploitation, and hardships (including famine and starvation in the nineteenth century) at the hands of their English masters, which brings us back to the music of the Clancy Brothers.

By the mid-twentieth century, three of the four historical provinces of Ireland had gained nominal and virtual independence from England, but the greater part of one—northern Ulster—remains under (somewhat indirect) English domination to this day. The Clancy's mid-twentieth-century repertoire of historic and contemporary songs blatantly promotes the cause of Northern Ireland's independence. To do so they resurrect earlier Romantic-era tropes of nationalist rebel-heroes promoted by Irish poet/playwrights, including W. B. Yeats and Pádraig Pearse.

The poet's creed had sparked a flame.
A raging fire it soon became . . .
They were the men with a vision,

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The men with a cause,
The men who defied their oppressors’ laws,
The men who traded their chains for guns.
Born into slavery, they were freedom’s sons.

Thus the Clancys sing of the 1916 Easter Rebellion, in Tommy Makem’s “Freedom’s Sons,” the title song of a live album recorded on the fiftieth anniversary of the uprising. The rebellion was put down, the poet Pearse was executed, and Yeats spent the rest of his life battling survivor’s guilt for his own extensive role in “sparking the flame.”¹¹

Whedon says *Firefly* was inspired by a novel of the American Civil War, and the American tendency to empathize with the losers. Americans empathize with the losers of the Easter Rebellion as well, or the Clancy Brothers and Tommy Makem would never have found a fan base this side of the pond. The battle of Serenity Valley, never forgotten by the losing rebels in the series, equates at least as well to the Easter Rebellion. To prove the case, let’s look for parallels between the values of Irish revolutionaries, the poetic tropes they use to express them, and Whedon’s space rebels. I will use the lyrics from one particular song from the Makem and Clancy repertoire, “Outlawed Raparee” (written by S. McGrath, T. Brett, M. O’Brian, and J. English, as performed by the Clancy Brothers and Tommy Makem on the Columbia LP *Freedom’s Sons*, 1966) to demonstrate how recurring themes in *Firefly* and *Serenity* express the same heroic, proletarian, revolutionary, anticolonial values.¹²

My spurs are rusted, my coat is rent,
my plume is damp with rain,
and the thistle down and the barley beards,
are thick on my horse’s mane.

Not only do the spacemen and women in *Firefly/Serenity* ride horses when planetside, but the ship *Serenity*, which looks like a metal horse, is rusted and rent. Its condition is a source of both constant humor and constant tension. An engine failure nearly kills the crew in the episode “Out of Gas.” Pieces pointedly fall off the ship in the opening, establishing shot and closing scenes of the film, *Serenity*. The message in the Clancy Brothers’ song and in Whedon’s futureverse is that these stories celebrate the common people. Working class. Poor. Earthy, and hence noble.

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Whedon's heroes may have a spaceship, but utterly unlike the crew of *Star Trek's* imposing *Enterprise*, they fly on a very low budget.

But my rifle's as bright as my sweetheart's eyes.
My arm is strong and free.
What care have I for your king or laws?
I'm an outlaw raparee.

The eyes of the captain's love—the prostitute Inara—do sparkle, usually in anger at him (and with love as soon as he leaves the room or is rendered unconscious). It is an old-fashioned chivalric love, but modern in that she is just as likely to be saving him from the Alliance (she has high status and good connections through her clients) as he is to be saving her from outlaws. She clearly grows to love him because he needs her, because he saves her, but especially because he saves others in need. That's where the heroism comes in, and that's what the rifles are for. Despite the future date, captain and crew carry very traditional sidearms, and sometimes rifles, which they are often shown cleaning with affectionate care. The strong arm of the crew, Jayne, even calls his favorite weapon Vera. His rifle *is* his sweetheart.

Protective aggression and sexuality go hand in hand in Whedon and the Clancy Brothers. Nowhere is this more evident than when a whorehouse madam under the crew's protection says to Captain Reynolds, "I've been waiting for you to kiss me . . . since I showed you my guns." A parallel, yes, but also a contrast to the more traditional gendering of the Clancys. Whedon lets the girls play with weapons, too; and, interestingly, they do not only carry firearms. Inara uses crossbow and rapier, while River Tam seems to prefer pike, battle-ax, and scythe—the latter the agricultural tool-weapon of the peasantry—simple, dramatic, humble, noble. Again, we have parallels from the Clancys. In the 1983 spoken introduction to "Four Green Fields," on the album *Makem and Clancy at the National Concert Hall: Live*, Liam Clancy and Tommy Makem describe the Irish history of peasant rebellion in which "thousands perished, shaking scythes at cannons." If the reader has any doubt as to the recurrent power of this standard trope, let us not forget the most classic of all Irish rebel songs, "Risín' of the Moon," performed by the Clancy Brothers on numerous albums—"for the pikes must be together by the risín' of the

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moon.” Like his ladies, Captain Reynolds’s arm is strong and free; he’s an outlaw raparee—er, Browncoat.

The mountain cavern is my home,
high up in the crystal air.
And my bed of limestone, Ireland’s ribs,
and the brown heath smelling fair.

“Take me out to the black, tell ’em I ain’t comin’ back,” goes the *Firefly* theme song. Both the Clancys and Whedon make use of wilderness as a point of purification, a site of freedom from the polluting influence of imposed domination and corrupt civilization. As Gerry Smyth points out, wilderness has been used this way in Irish tradition since the early medieval church, when mendicant monks and hermits sought God in the heather. Never having disappeared from the Irish worldview, it appears as recently as music by the contemporary Irish band U2, who explore the relationship of wilderness, freedom, and ethical outlawry in much the same way as the Clancy Brothers’ *Raparee*.¹³

We’ll meet them off on equal ground,
and we’ll fight them foot to foot.

Captain Mal Reynolds of the spaceship *Serenity* was once Sergeant Malcolm Reynolds of the Browncoat army. Although he denies it, many characters can’t help seeing and commenting that he has never stopped fighting the war against the Alliance. At the turning point of the film *Serenity*, he tells the crew, “Sure as I know anything, I know this. They will try again. Maybe on another world, maybe on this very ground swept clean. A year from now, ten, they’ll swing back to the belief that they can *make* people better. I do not hold to that. So no more running. I aim to misbehave.”¹⁴ Irish music, poetry, theater, even film—are rife with references to the past wrongs of English kings and generals; this serves to magnify current wrongs by placing them into patterns of historical context, thus motivating contemporary and future revolt.

Hunted from out our fathers’ home,
pursued by steel and shot,
a bloody warfare we must wage,
or the gibbet be our lot.

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Simon and River Tam, brother and sister, were once elites, brought up to side with Alliance values and believe its justifications for its domination over the “uncivilized” colonies. We learn that as children they play-fought the same war Mal Reynolds fought on the battlefield, but they played for the other side, the Alliance side. Yet the Alliance took River—still in her teens—for training as a programmed killer, torturing her routinely. The gibbet was used as an instrument of torturous death in English-dominated Ireland. Torture figures prominently in the imagery of *Firefly/Serenity*. Like the raparee of old Eire, the Tams and the crew have no choice but to run or fight, and run they do; finally in the film, they stop running and turn to fight.

It is the bondage of River—a woman named for a feature of geography—that leads her brother to begin his life of crime by breaking her free. Irish myth, song, and poetry are rife with images of the land as female, from the goddess Danu of pre-Christian Ireland to images of Eyre, the island itself (*herself*). In another Tommy Makem song, “Four Green Fields,” the land is a “fine old woman,” who sings of her oppressed children and brave-hearted sons. Here, true Irish manhood is conceived of as taking up arms to liberate an idealized feminine. David Magill sees this defense of women and of the weak as a defining characteristic of masculinity in *Firefly* and *Serenity*.¹⁵ Ultimately, Mal Reynolds is fighting for his chosen family (his people) and his ship, which is also coded female like the land of Ireland. (That River Tam is increasingly revealed as the strongest member of the crew is a modern twist to the age-old gendered nationalist trope.)

A robber’s war is welcome once,
the hunted outlaw knows,
he steps unto his country’s love,
o’er the corpses of his foes.

“Love keeps her in the air when she ought to fall down,” Captain Reynolds tells River at the end of the film *Serenity*. But *Serenity* is only a ship; what of *country* in Whedon’s space opera? The Browncoats did not fight for a single country; they fought for the independence of a multitude of separate planets and moons. We learn nothing of Captain Reynolds’s homeland in the series *Firefly* or in the film *Serenity*, only that he grew up on a ranch, on a planet as obscure to the viewer as its name, Shadow. The few crew members who

“MY RIFLE’S AS BRIGHT AS MY SWEETHEART’S EYES”

have named points of origin in their pasts never speak of them enough to give these places any real identity. Whedon’s universe is a postcolonial, postmodern ’verse, where the universal application of ideals and the bonds of transitory human relations matter more than nation.

The Clancy Brothers and Tommy Makem were nationalists, yet they themselves eventually embraced a universal creed, expressing great pride that liberation movements beyond the bounds of Ireland took up many of their songs as inspiration. Weaver states that even the poet laureate of Ireland—W. B. Yeats himself—embraced internationalist values in his old age, turning increasingly to a romanticized East, and even, in his later works, acknowledging the mentoring influence of England on his own development.¹⁶ The contrast is not so great after all; Whedon begins with a maturity of vision that previous generations lived lifetimes to achieve.

Chorus: Lift your glass as friends with mine,
and give your hand to me.
I’m England’s foe,
I’m Ireland’s friend,
I’m an outlawed raparee.

This Clancy Brothers and Tommy Makem song, as do so many of their works, ends with an invitation to a very proletarian camaraderie. There is no shortage of comradely drinking scenes in *Firefly* or *Serenity*. These scenes function as release of tension between intense action and emotive scenes, and to reveal human relationships—sometimes ending in a brawl, often ending in shared knowledge, shared concerns, brotherhood, good times. Significantly, these scenes in *Firefly* make frequent use of acoustic Appalachian-style folk music, complete with traditional Irish drums, music with roots in the Celtic fiddle tunes kept alive and brought forward by the Clancy Brothers. Like the Clancy Brothers and Tommy Makem, Whedon seeks to change the world through his art by motivating others to join the cause. It is, ultimately, a friendly invitation.¹⁷

Notes

1. “Shindig” is the in-group terminology used in *Firefly/Serenity* fandom for a celebratory gathering of fans, often, but not always, in “period” costume.

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2. The Bedlam Bards have vastly expanded their fan base through association with *Firefly*. They have produced a CD of filk songs (*On the Drift*) relating to the series and film, and they are featured in the DVD documentary *Done the Impossible*, about *Firefly* and *Serenity* fandom.

3. The ship is as important to the series' characters as Ireland—the physical land, political nation, and familial home—is to an Irish patriot.

4. Donna L. Potts, "Convents, Claddagh Rings, and Even the Book of Kells: Representing the Irish in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*," *SIMILE* 3, no. 2 (May 2003), <http://utpjournals.metapress.com/content/x591886k8263t988/?p=a3810cbc4f184440b67323dc0603c2d8&pi=1> (accessed November 11, 2008).

5. Nicole McClure, "Tainted Blood: Irish 'Otherness' and Hybridity in *Dracula* and *Angel*." Unpublished paper presented at the Slayage Conference on the Whedonverses, Gordon College, Barnesville, Ga., 2006.

6. "Spin the Bottle." *Angel* (Season 4). DVD. Dir. Joss Whedon. Twentieth Century Fox, 2002.

7. Linda Jencson, "'Aiming to Misbehave': Role Modeling Political Conditions and Political Action in the Serenityverse," *Slayage: The Online International Journal of Buffy Studies* 25 (2008), http://slayageonline.com/EBS/buffy_studies/scholars_critics/f-j/jencson.htm (accessed November 11, 2008).

8. Fans refer to themselves as Browncoats after the freedom-fighting soldiers of the series. Color plays an important role in group identity in the *Firefly* 'verse where Browncoat rebels fight the gray-uniformed galactic Alliance and its shadow government ally, the Blue Hand Corporation; color is also important in Irish political history, where Irish patriot Greens fought pro-British Orangemen, with occasional intervention by the Blue Shirts, or the Black and Tan, respectively.

9. That the Clancy Brothers and Tommy Makem celebrated crimes against property committed for the cause of Irish independence is clear from their 1966 Columbia LP, *Freedom's Sons*. On the album cover they are shown posing laughing and jeering with the decapitated head of a statue of Lord Nelson, blown up by Irish sympathizers, not in the distant past, but that year. Their song "Lord Nelson" celebrates the crime. In later years, as Irish Republican Army attacks on public targets killed innocent civilians, their support for rebellion mellowed and they withdrew vocal support of the organization, without ever backing down on the issue of independence.

10. Joss Whedon, "Bonus Material": *Serenity*. DVD. Universal Pictures, 2005.

11. Carmel Jordan, *A Terrible Beauty: The Easter Rebellion and Yeats's "Great Tapestry"* (Lewisburg, Pa.: Bucknell University Press, 1987), 66.

12. There is conflicting information regarding the authorship of "Outlawed Raparee." It can be found on the vinyl LP *Freedom's Sons* (recorded live in Dublin

in 1966, to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the Easter Rebellion), where authorship is credited to S. McGrath, T. Britt, M. O’Brian, and J. English. Research reveals their full first names to be Seamus, Tom, Michael, and James. Yet an online BMI repertoire search lists Liam, Patrick, and Tom Clancy (the Clancy Brothers) as the authors while simultaneously acknowledging the song to be “traditional”—in other words, a folk song, author unknown.

13. Gerry Smyth, *Space and the Irish Cultural Imagination* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 179–82.

14. *Serenity*. DVD. Dir. Josh Whedon. Universal Studios Home Entertainment, 2005.

15. David Magill, “I Aim to Misbehave’: Masculinities in the ‘Verse,” in *Investigating Firefly and Serenity: Science Fiction on the Frontier*, eds. Rhonda V. Wilcox and Tanya R. Cochran (London: I. B. Taurus, 2008), 79.

16. Rebecca Weaver, “W. B. Yeats’s Imagined East and Ireland in the Post-Colonial Context,” in *W. B. Yeats and Post-Colonialism*, ed. Deborah Fleming (West Cornwall, Conn.: Locust Hill Press, 2001), 320.

17. This chapter is dedicated in loving memory to my father, William Jencson, who had made me a Clancy Brothers and Tommy Makem fan at the age of 17, and to his brother, Dan Jencson, who first shared his love of the Clancys with my father in the early 1960s. It’s Uncle Dan who still peppers family visits with liberal doses of the music of the Clancy Brothers and Tommy Makem.

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE MEANING OF
“WORLD MUSIC” IN *FIREFLY*

Eric Hung



As cable channels gained an ever-larger share of television viewers over the past three decades, network executives gradually shifted their programming strategies. Instead of focusing on getting the largest audiences, they began to concentrate on reaching the most lucrative viewers (i.e., the affluent white urban middle/upper-class population that is most attractive to advertisers) and cultivating the most loyal fans. One result of this shift is what has been variously dubbed “quality popular television,” “must-see TV,” and “appointment television”: shows that dedicated fans watch compulsively and around which they plan their schedules.

What makes these shows such “essential viewing”? One reason is certainly the target audience’s identification with such elements as white-collar leads and suburban locales with their dark secrets. Another appears to be the highly literary nature of these shows, which appeals to their highly educated audiences. Viewers fear that, if they miss an episode, they would miss some of the many intertextual references embedded throughout the series. As Mark Jancovich and James Lyons write, “Each minor event on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is contextualized with hours of prior narrative or ‘backstory’ that invests each moment, and the characters’ responses within it, with a weight of nuance and significance.”¹

Over the past decade, one of the most innovative creators of “quality popular television” has been Joss Whedon. For many fans, an added bonus is his shows’ supposed progressive politics. On the political and cultural blog



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Daily Kos, a blogger named Simon matter-of-factly states, “Whedon’s politics are liberal; off the screen, he did some fundraisers for Kerry. On screen, his work on *Buffy*, *Angel* and *Firefly* was shot through with liberal—and anti-establishment—themes.”² Meanwhile, Jane Stadler argues that “*Angel* can be interpreted as a critique of xenophobia,” and Matthew Clayfield asserts that “I honestly don’t see how you could read *Serenity* as anything other than progressive.”³ Such interpretations of Whedon’s works have led the international human rights organization Equality Now to honor Whedon for his contribution to gender equality in film and television in 2006.⁴

Although liberal readings of Whedon’s oeuvre dominate the blogosphere (and to a lesser extent academic studies of Whedon), some commentators have begun to offer divergent views. Although these critics do not doubt Whedon’s progressive intentions, they have problematized some of the ways his shows deal with race and gender. Kent Ono contends that *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* contains “debilitating images and ideas about people of color,” and Christina Rowley concludes that the world of *Firefly* and *Serenity* “ultimately remains constrained by conventional (‘here-and-now’) notions of gender.”⁵

In this chapter, I focus on the sociopolitical implications of one of *Firefly*’s most distinctive features: the extensive use of “world music” on its soundtrack.⁶ Although the inclusion of musical sounds from around the world suggests an embrace of multiculturalism, a closer examination paints a more ambiguous picture. More often than not, “world music” is used in *Firefly* to portray villains, the feminine “Other,” and societies with which the crew fights. In this way, I build upon the work of such scholars as Neil Lerner and Agnes Curry; both have raised the possibility that the music of this series might reinforce rather than dispel old racial stereotypes. Specifically, Lerner connects Jubal Early’s theme in the “Objects in Space” episode (F14) to musical representations of black rapists in Hollywood films dating all the way back to *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), and Curry discusses the problematic use of stereotypically “Indian” (Native American) music to accompany the Reavers.⁷

The “Progressiveness” of “World Music”

Before outlining the use of “world music” in *Firefly*, a discussion of the meaning and connotation of this odd term is necessary. On the face of it,

“world music” can refer to any music produced on earth, but a visit to any record store reveals that the term has a quite different meaning. “World music” became a common label in the late 1980s, and it initially denoted non-European/Euro-American musics. By the early 1990s, however, the term became “an umbrella category” for all musics perceived to be closely tied to non-American folk traditions, or what is now often referred to as roots music, and includes flamenco, “Celtic” music, and much of the popular music by non-Western musicians.⁸ Significantly, American folk-based music is placed in such categories as “folk,” “blues,” and “country” (more on this later). Philip Sweeney, author of *The Virgin Directory of World Music*, discusses the popularization of this term:

One of the obstacles to persuading record shops to stock much of the new international product was reported to be the lack of an identifying category to describe it[;] record shop managers didn’t know whether to call it “ethnic,” “folk,” “international,” or some other equivalent, and were inclined in the absence of an appropriate niche in their racks simply to reject it. It was decided, as part of a month-long promotion that October [1987], to create such a tag and attempt to spread its use. . . . After a good deal of discussion the term chosen was world music.⁹

Sweeney’s quote is notable not only for outlining the origins of using “world music” as an “identifying category,” but also for revealing the close connection between the use of a new “tag” and the creation of a new “niche.” To put it another way, if “world music” were to be a successful marketing label, then record executives needed to create a type of consumer who was interested in going through the “world music” racks and purchasing such wildly dissimilar musics as Senegalese pop, Argentinean tango, and Balinese gamelan.

Judging by sales figures, sold-out tours by numerous “world music” artists, and marketing research, it is clear that record executives quickly found their target customers. Bob Haddad, president for the now-defunct Music of the World label, summarizes, “The buyers of purer ethnic music tend to be well-educated, well-travelled, 25 and over—often between 35 and 60 years old—and might speak several languages.”¹⁰ Similarly, Randall Grass, vice president at Shanachie Records, states, “We discovered that the demographics of the people buying Irish albums were the same as for those buying reggae and world beat. Not the same individuals, necessarily, but the same demographic—mostly white, college-educated adults

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looking for something different.”¹¹ In short, record executives found that they could market “world music” to highly educated, mostly white adults who value what Timothy Taylor has called the “new global informational capital.” Specifically, he argues that there is increasing emphasis “in developed countries of possessing a kind of capital that stands in for real knowledge of the world in this moment of globalization and transnationalism,” and listening to “world music” is an example of this capital.¹²

With regard to *Firefly*, what is important is that “world music” not only shares the target audience of “quality popular television,” but it also came to be associated with antiestablishment (or at least liberal) politics. As Taylor writes, “It seems that if a nonwhite musician takes on an overt political position—though the politics must be national or global, not local—he or she might qualify for the ‘world music’ bin. The construction seems to be something like oppressed people = authentic politics = authentic (or ‘cultural’) music.”¹³ Given these connotations, it is no surprise that, for left-leaning Whedon fans, the use of “world music” was another sign of the hipness, boldness, and progressiveness of *Firefly*.

Three Uses of “World Music”

Although “world music” is certainly an attractive element of *Firefly*—if nothing else, it increases the stylistic and timbral variety of the show’s soundtrack—a careful examination suggests that Greg Edmonson’s score might not be so politically progressive. Throughout the series, “Western music”—including music with roots in Western art music as well as American country-and-western music—is used to accompany *Serenity*’s crew (other than Inara) and to connote power (e.g., horns and trumpets for the Alliance), while “world music” primarily underscores the “Others”: villains who lack moral compasses, sex workers, and exotic cultures that have not been touched by the Alliance’s civilizing mission. In this way, *Firefly*’s score reaffirms the “West = us, East = them” dichotomy that so much of progressive politics seeks to deconstruct.

“World Music” for Villains

Firefly uses “world music” to underscore two recurring villains: Adellei Niska and the Reavers. Played by Michael Fairman, Niska is a crime boss who tries to achieve wealth and power through fear. He speaks with

a heavy Eastern European accent, hires scary-looking henchmen, and thoroughly enjoys watching people get tortured. In his first appearance in “The Train Job” (F2), Niska asks Mal Reynolds, the captain of *Serenity*, to steal some packages from a train. Even before *Serenity* docks at Niska’s Skyplex, the crew begins discussing Niska’s character. Mal tells Inara to stay on *Serenity* because Niska “has a very unlovely rep. If he’s got work for me, fine, but I don’t—I’m not sure you’d be safe” (chapter 4; 13:01–13:09). The music begins as Mal exits Inara’s room and the scene changes to an exterior shot showing *Serenity* docking (13:21). Immediately, we hear an ominous drone, made more menacing by a rapidly fluctuating overtone structure that creates a pulsing feel, and a melody played by an amplified Armenian *duduk*, a double-reed instrument that was used extensively in *Battlestar Galactica* and in such movies as *The Crow*, *Gladiator*, and *Syriana* to denote otherworldliness, loneliness, and mourning or to supply a Middle Eastern / Central Asian atmosphere. As the scene proceeds, the drone continues, sometimes rearticulated with heavy accents to heighten the threatening atmosphere. Meanwhile, the melody fades when the dialogue begins, but reappears quietly on a few occasions.

Niska returns in the “War Stories” episode (F10). In the teaser, a shot of his Skyplex (chapter 1; 1:56) cuts to a scene where he and one of his minions torture an unnamed man to the accompaniment of the same music. In case viewers had not recognized that the *duduk* melody is a musical representation of Niska (and his criminal empire) in “The Train Job,” this scene confirms the link. Later, the *duduk* and the drone are heard again, sometimes with melodic variations, when Mal and Wash are kidnapped and brought to Niska’s Skyplex (18:35), when Niska appears to begin torturing his hostages (20:58), when Zoë boards the Skyplex to rescue them (25:27), and in subsequent torture and fight scenes.

This music is Niska’s musical marker and like the psychotic crime boss, it does not vary much. Rhythmically free, full of augmented seconds, and played with generous vibrato, this ornamented melody and the accompanying drone contain numerous gestures Western composers used to represent the Middle East, from Félicien David’s *Le désert* (1844) to Richard Strauss’s *Salome* (1905).¹⁴ For viewers who are not familiar with Western classical music, these tropes might still be familiar through numerous movies that take place in the Middle East and such songs as The Pogues’ “Turkish Song of the Damned” (1987).

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In the post-9/11 environment, I find the use of Middle Eastern-sounding music to portray Niska to be perhaps effective, but politically rather troubling. First, it is clear that Niska's music is based upon his actions and not his genealogy or heritage; after all, little about this crime boss—his skin color, his accent, his dress, or even his name—suggests a Middle Eastern or even Central Asian background. Second, we live in a society that often associates the Middle East primarily with terrorism, violence, and tyranny. Using music that connotes the Middle East to accompany a warlord like Niska might therefore be logical. Unfortunately, it also seems to promote, or at least play into, a common but rather demonized view of the region and its many cultures.

In a recent article, Agnes Curry details the extensive use of “Indian” (Native American) stereotypes in the portrayal of Reavers. With regard to music, she focuses on the scene in the pilot (F1) where *Serenity* first flies near a Reaver ship (chapter 12; 52:57–56:37):

In the pilot scene, the threat [i.e., the sighting of a mysterious ship] is signaled with a change in tonal progression through various harmonically related but unresolved chords, rendered mainly in strings accented with some light chiming. Both the strings and the chimes remain with a distinctively European musical language, the chimes having a connection with the ominous tolling of church bells. The music continues its changes through the scene as Mal and Wash try to get a view of the ship approaching them. Then Mal utters, “Reavers,” and the music changes immediately to, predictably, a drum beat with a stress on the first beat—updated to an extent with a metallic tone in there but still unmistakably stereotypical of Hollywood “Injuns.”¹⁵

Although Curry moves on to discuss other elements of Indian coding after this paragraph, her point that Reavers are depicted by stereotypical “Indian tribal drumbeats” is confirmed toward the end of the pilot. Here, Jayne's announcement that Reavers have followed *Serenity* is followed by a shot of the Reaver ship accompanied by the same drumbeats (chapter 17; 1:13:04 *ff*). In the next scene, which involves a delay in *Serenity*'s departure and hence the crew's ability to escape, the Reaver music returns to remind viewers of the urgency of the situation. Finally, drumbeats form the foundation of the underscore of the escape scene and are most prominent when the Reaver ship is seen.

In “Bushwacked” (F3), the other episode with Reavers, the drumbeats are first heard shortly after Mal discovers all the mangled bodies tied up near the ceiling of the derelict boat they boarded (chapter 4; 15:18). Although for several minutes he does not tell the others that Reavers are the perpetrators of the crime, viewers who watched the pilot can easily recognize that Reavers are involved. Later on, the drumbeats return—now played on what sounds like an amplified piano below a string melody remarkably similar to the “Jubal Early” theme in “Objects in Space” (F14)—accompanying a montage depicting the crew’s attempt to defuse a booby trap left by the Reavers, the survivor on the derelict ship slowly transforming into a Reaver, and River’s ability to read the mind of the survivor (chapter 7; 23:26–25:14). When the Alliance officers board *Serenity*, the “Indian music” is heard again (chapter 8; 28:34–28:47). This might suggest that the oppressive central government is as “evil” as the Reavers. Given the forthcoming attack by the survivor (also accompanied by the drumbeats), however, this cue just as likely signals that the Alliance was now entering Reaver territory.

In an intriguing article entitled “Reavers and Redskins,” J. Douglas Rabb and J. Michael Richardson argue that Whedon uses Reavers to attack—rather than reinforce—stereotypes of Native Americans. They further assert, “It is, of course, necessary to present such stereotypes in order to deconstruct them.”¹⁶ The main evidence for their argument comes from *Serenity*, the 2005 movie sequel to the television series. Here, it is disclosed that Reavers were the product of an Alliance experiment gone wrong. The Alliance gassed the planet Miranda to pacify its people, but this ended up killing 99.9 percent of the population and turning the remainder into Reavers. Based on this revelation, Rabb and Richardson argue that Whedon uses “Indian” stereotypes to create the following parallel: just as the Alliance created the monsters that haunt their universe, it is European Americans who created the idea that Native Americans are savages. They write, “Viewers of *Firefly* and *Serenity* who see Reavers as Redskins—at least those of us of British or European heritage—are brought to the uncomfortable realization . . . that ‘we made them.’”¹⁷

With regard to *Serenity*, Rabb and Richardson’s argument has some merit.¹⁸ As they assert, one way to deconstruct a stereotype is to invoke it and then show it to be ridiculous. In *Serenity*, the visual tropes of the Hollywood “Indian”—without the drumbeats—are invoked in the first images

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of Reavers: brown skin, long black hair, and Mohawk hair. These are soon intermixed, however, with shots of Reavers with blond hair, dreadlocks, and other non-“Indian” features. Here, one can reasonably read these images as a deconstruction of the “Indian” stereotype: the Reavers do not necessarily look the way we expect them to look.

That said, it is hard to apply Rabb and Richardson’s reading to *Firefly* and especially its music. In the television series’ more ambiguous moral universe, there is not a parallel deconstructive move; nothing suggests that the “Indian” coding is ridiculous. The “tribal drumbeats,” just like Middle Eastern-sounding music, signify threats, no matter what they look like. (After all, we do not see Reavers in the television series, and there is nothing to suggest that Niska is of Middle Eastern origin.) In effect, these sounds become “universal” emblems of menace. Given the long association between this music and racial groups that were long seen as threats to the stability and prosperity of the United States, it is hard to construct a “progressive” reading of *Firefly*’s score; it functions to reinforce rather than deconstruct old racial stereotypes.

“World Music” for Sex Workers

Firefly also uses “world music” to underscore sex workers, who fall into one of two categories in the series. While those who receive extensive training and are registered with the guild are referred to as “companions,” the “unofficial” sex workers go by the unflattering label “whore.” Two “companions” appear in *Firefly*. One is Yolanda-Saffron-Bridget, who appears in “Our Mrs. Reynolds” and “Trash.” She does not work as a “companion” in the show—she is there to con the many men she marries—and will therefore not be discussed in this section. The other “companion” is Inara, who rents the shuttle on *Serenity* and is a major character in most episodes. A descendent of the *oiran* or some other Asian courtesan tradition, Inara has a room and wardrobe that are richly textured and heavily (South) Asian-influenced. She is often accompanied by the pipa and pentatonic melodies, and her music is also notable for how different it is from the other musical cues. Composer Greg Edmonson once stated, “Inara’s room always had a certain sound, always an Asian influence or it always had a violin.”¹⁹ In “The Future Is the Past: Music and History in *Firefly*,” Kendra Leonard has convincingly demonstrated that Inara’s contrasting music helps to mark her uniqueness

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and separateness, “ultimately signifying her as both apart from the rest of the crew and apart from the audience, the classic feminine Other.”²⁰

In the “Heart of Gold” episode, we encounter a brothel on one of the outer planets. As the episode begins, we see a shot of the planet, accompanied by a solo voice singing in a South Asian vocal style and a drone. As the song continues, the shot closes in on two “whores” hanging clothes outside the brothel. In the next shot, we see a caravan of horses and a flying automobile approach the house from afar. At this point, a techno beat enters beneath the vocal line. Although the beat is most likely meant to depict the approaching unwelcome guests, the combination of the vocal line and the beat result in music that resembles modern bhangra, a popular genre developed primarily by British youth of South Asian descent that combines elements of a Punjabi folk dance (especially the beats of the *dhhol* drum) and Anglo-American popular music.

In the first scene in the brothel, during which discussions of “hooking up” abound, there appears to be some sort of Orientalist music playing very quietly in the background. Later at the theater, the villain Rance Burgess tells a funny story about a boy who took “a clean woman’s virtue,” to the accompaniment of Chinese-sounding music (accompanying what appears to be a representation of Balinese or Javanese shadow puppetry; 10:56). As planning for the gunfight gets under way and a romance between Mal and Nandi (the head of the brothel) develops, however, the Orientalist music disappears.

The scoring for Inara, especially in the many scenes where she is depicted erotically (e.g., when she is with her clients, bathing herself, or doing another crew member’s hair), and the scoring in the “Heart of Gold” episode appear to link Orientalist music with temporary or even disingenuous thrills. So, is *Firefly* simply falling back on old-fashioned Orientalism? In “Orientalism in *Firefly* and *Serenity*,” Rebecca M. Brown details the extensive use of old Orientalist tropes but comes to a surprising conclusion. Following Edward Said, she argues that Orientalism is a discourse produced by and for a colonial power. She furthermore contends that, since the audience sees the futuristic world of *Firefly* from the point of view of “a nomadic collection of disparate people who operate on the margins of society” and not through the eyes of the Alliance (i.e., the colonial power), the show’s “Orientalisms cannot be read solely as a recapitulation of 19th and 20th century Orientalisms.”²¹

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While Brown's interpretation deserves attention, it is not particularly applicable to the soundtrack. First, most of the Orientalist music is non-diegetic, and it therefore exists outside the world of the "nomadic collection of disparate people" who populate the show. Second, much recent research has shown that Orientalist assumptions are often so deep in American society that, whatever the artists' intentions, audiences are likely to fall back on what Deborah Wong has called "Orientalist pleasure"—delighted responses to stereotypical portrayals of Asians.²²

"World Music" for Exotic Settings

"World music" is used both diegetically and non-diegetically to depict several of *Serenity's* destinations. In "Our Mrs. Reynolds" (F6), the episode opens in an unnamed location that is full of bandits, and this is underscored with a melody that imitates the glottal stops or "vocal hic-cups" that characterize the music of many Middle Eastern or Eastern European traditions. Meanwhile, the partially diegetic music in the carnival scene in "The Message" (F12) is a "world music" fusion that includes a Middle Eastern melody with quartertones and such instruments as a South American panpipe, and the dance scene in "Safe" (F5), which is set on the poor colony of Jiangyin, includes an extended arrangement of an Irish jig entitled "The Sailor's Wife."

What is significant here is that "world music" does not connote race; all the above destinations are multiethnic. Rather, it serves to denote poverty and the lack of "civilization"; the richer and more "cultured" locales are never accompanied by "world music." A case in point is Persephone. In the pilot, viewers see skyscrapers and heavy traffic as *Serenity* approaches the planet, but we quickly realize that the ship is landing in a slum area. This scene is underscored with a fusion that one might find in the "world music" racks: a mellow plucked string instrument (most likely an oud) playing a small-ranged melody with a drone. In "Shindig" (F4), the ship returns and lands in a much more affluent area. Here, the music that accompanies the crew's first steps on the planet is not "world music," but rather a country-and-western-influenced tune played by a violin and guitar and in a fairly "classical" way (i.e., without the twangy sound and slides that characterize much of the other music throughout the series). Moreover, despite the multicultural décor and dresses at the snooty gala

later in this episode, only Western classical music (admittedly with some “Oriental” flutes in the orchestra) is used. In an interview with Helen San, Edmonson states:

Since [*Firefly*] was post apocalyptic, all the cultures were thrown together. I never saw it specifically as a Chinese influence, although of course they spoke Chinese, which was clever. I saw it as all these cultures tossed into a giant melting pot, and stirred around. You can come out with anything. There was never a conscious decision to do anything other than that, but look at how many wonderful directions that can take you.²³

Although I have no reason to doubt Edmonson’s sincerity in the above statement, the foregoing analysis demonstrates that—at least in terms of music—the world of *Firefly* is not a simple melting pot. Five centuries have not erased the notion that different categories of music have different connotations and varying levels of prestige. As Rebecca Brown states, *Firefly* shows us “that the constructions of the Other we inherit cannot simply be overcome, blown away, or swept under the rug. They are replaced by new constructions (Independents by Reavers) and the old Others (Asian language, dress, behavior) are often incorporated into the Self in complex ways.”²⁴ Then as now, Western classical music, as demonstrated in the gala scene, is highest on the hierarchy. Meanwhile, “world music”—which is currently becoming more “classicized”—is associated with villainy, the primitive, and women who engage in the oldest profession in *Firefly*’s universe.²⁵

The “Other” on “Others”

In the end, does the use of “world music” in *Firefly* demonstrate the soundtrack to be politically regressive? Like so many aspects of Whedon’s oeuvre, the answer to this question is not so straightforward. In an article entitled “Marching out of Step: Music and Otherness in the *Firefly/Serenity* Saga,” Christopher Neal persuasively argues that the music for the crew emphasizes the Otherness of our protagonists. As evidence, he points first to the theme song’s “stop-and-go feel,” which “emphasizes the meandering and varied pace of the [*Serenity*] crew’s

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lifestyle.”²⁶ He also discusses the extensive use of the solo fiddle to depict crew members, which “evokes the loneliness inherent in flying such a tiny ship out in the middle of space, emphasizing the point that the crew lives outside society.”²⁷

In fact, one can extend Neal’s assertion and argue that—in the world of *Firefly*—the crew’s twangy “country-and-western music” occupies a similar place in the musical hierarchy as “world music.” After all, many planets are depicted with a combination of these two genres. When the crew lands on the poor colony of Jiangyin in “Safe,” for example, the first music we hear is “country music.” It is only later that we see the population participate in Irish dance. Similarly, in “Our Mrs. Reynolds,” we first hear “world music” depicting the primitive location. At the evening party in the next scene, however, the people celebrate with “country-western dancing.” This combination of “country music” and “world music” suggests that *Serenity*’s crew is as marginal to the *Firefly* universe as Niska, the citizens of Jiangyin, and the “whores.” All of them lack the musical trademark of those with power: Western classical music and the sound of horns.²⁸

In “You Can Take ‘Country’ out of the Country, But It Will Never Be ‘World,’” Timothy Taylor examines how the music industry constructed the labels “country music” and “world music” into “brand-categories.” Despite the fact that many examples of both genres can legitimately claim to be based on folk or traditional music, these two labels are often seen as ideologically opposed and are marketed to different audiences:

It seems to me that the categorization of country music generally, and with respect to “world music” in particular, works through a series of binary exclusions: country isn’t seen as authentic, it’s commercial; it’s not political, but commercial; it’s not primal, authentic, or “cultural,” it’s commercial; it’s not black, but white; it’s not rebellious but complacent; it’s not middle class but working class.²⁹

Although these binarisms are clearly not reality—there are after all liberal and conservative “country” musicians who make political statements through their music, and there are many practitioners of “world music” who care more about money than cultural integrity—these constructions do have real and practical consequences.

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Over the past two decades, “world music” has become increasingly “classicized” and prestigious. While “classical” radio stations and magazines began covering “world music” (*Gramophone*, the prestigious British “classical” music magazine, even started *Songlines*, a magazine devoted to “world music”), prestigious performing arts venues, including Carnegie Hall and the BBC Proms, are sponsoring concerts of “world music.” Equally significantly, universities are incorporating mandatory “world music” courses in their music degrees. During the same period, few “classical” venues have presented stars of American “country music,” and even fewer universities teach it seriously. For many elites, “country music” is the soundtrack of—to paraphrase Barack Obama’s unfortunate campaign speech—bitter rural dwellers who cling to guns, religion, and anti-immigrant sentiments. It is no accident that, of the protagonists, it is Jayne—the most unsophisticated and anti-intellectual crew member—who participates most fully in “country music.” He plays guitar during the party scene on “Our Mrs. Reynolds.” As Taylor writes, “country music is still the province of premodern (or barely modern) rednecks. Or so many in the music industry would have one believe.”³⁰

By treating “country music” and “world music” as somewhat equivalent genres, *Firefly* in essence deconstructs the opposing ideologies of these two “brand-categories.” In fact, it goes one step further. As I mentioned in the introduction, the target audience of the series—highly educated and middle-class (or higher) white adults—is likely to be more sympathetic with the ideologies of “world music” than with the connotations of “country music.” Under these circumstances, *Firefly* offers a clever twist. Specifically, the show asks its audience to sympathize much more with characters associated with “country music” (i.e., *Serenity*’s crew minus Inara) than with most characters accompanied by “world music.” Outside the *Firefly* universe, the show’s “sophisticated” and liberal viewers would likely prefer hanging out at a hip club with *duduk* music to doing line dancing at a country-western bar. Within the show, however, our heroes are the Midwest-accented line dancers and our villain is an exotic sophisticate, complete with a cool foreign accent (Niska).

Given the huge gulf between the aesthetic world of *Firefly* and the aesthetic preferences of its target audiences, it is no surprise that Fox executives quickly became anxious about the Western (i.e., the Western genre, not European American) aspects of the show—an unease that led

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the show's creators to hide various components. With regards to "Bush-whacked," for example, Tim Minear, the series' executive producer, writes, "The network really, *really* hated the Western element, so my feeling on this episode was to try to keep it all in spaceships so it wouldn't have the onus of sage and tumbleweed."³¹ Similarly, in "Our Mrs. Reynolds," Greg Edmonson hid the Western elements by using Asian sounds. He states, "In the opening . . . they're in a covered wagon. It wasn't specifically a Western, but this was near the end when they [the network executives] just said, 'Get rid of all the Western elements.' . . . So as it fades from black, I had a sitar playing and then I had Chinese vocals, just purely to say, 'This is not a Western Western. It's a different Western.'"³²

In one of the aforementioned interviews with Edmonson, he stated that, since all cultures are "thrown together . . . tossed into a giant melting pot, and stirred around" in *Firefly's* post-apocalyptic universe, "you can come out with anything."³³ In the end, an analysis of the use of "world music" in the show and Fox executives' demands that some ingredients be taken out of the melting pot demonstrate the difficulties of creating a universe that does not carry remnants of old stereotypes.

Music contains social meanings only through consistent associations established through a long period of time. "Tribal drumbeats" do not naturally sound threatening; they can potentially sound triumphant or signify the march of Italians or Chinese or any other ethnic group. They came to symbolize threatening "Indians" only because composers consistently used them to connote threatening "Indians." Similarly, slow pentatonic music does not have to depict alluring Orientals. It acquired this meaning only through repeated usage.

To write effective music for television, one needs to rely on these established tropes. Cues are often very short, and they are often in the background. If they are to convey any information or emotion to viewers, they need to be very clear; television is not the place to create new meanings for musical gestures. Given the history of minority typecasting in American film and television, the fact is that most of the "ethnic" musical gestures have rather specific meanings. When we hear rap on the soundtrack, we would be surprised to see a straitlaced Indian lawyer on screen. Similarly, when we hear a Native American flute melody, we are not expecting to see a brawl. To make Inara and Nandi appear more exotic and sensual, Whedon and Edmonson resorted to Orientalist sounds. Similarly, to

reinforce Niska’s threatening nature, they had to use music that is associated, in the American imagination, with an ethnic group that often appears menacing. Under these circumstances, it is no surprise that even Whedon’s immensely talented team with their liberal intentions could not create a multicultural score that is free of old prejudices.

Notes

1. Mark Jancovich and James Lyons, introduction to *Quality Popular Television: Cult TV, the Industry and Fans*, ed. Mark Jancovich and James Lyons (London: British Film Institute, 2003), 1.

2. “Simon,” “Firefly, Serenity and Politics (and Poll),” *Daily Kos*, www.dailykos.com/story/2005/9/29/22437/2481 (accessed October 26, 2008).

3. Jane Stadler, “Becoming the Other: Multiculturalism in Joss Whedon’s *Angel*,” FlowTV, <http://flowtv.org/?p=997>; Matthew Clayfield, “Serenity,” Esoteric Rabbit Blog, www.esotericrabbit.com/blog/?p=162 (accessed October 26, 2008).

4. It should be noted that Whedon is a longtime activist and fund-raiser for Equality Now.

5. Kent A. Ono, “To Be a Vampire on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*: Race and (‘Other’) Socially Marginalizing Positions on Horror TV,” in *Fantasy Girls: Gender in the New Universe of Science Fiction and Fantasy Television*, ed. Elyce Rae Helford (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 163; Christina Rowley, “*Firefly/Serenity*: Gendered Space and Gendered Bodies,” *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 9 (2007): 318.

6. Much of the Western-sounding music in this series uses a hybrid ensemble (e.g., Western strings plus East Asian winds). These cues, such as the music in the ball scene in “Safe” (F5), do not strike this listener as “world music” and would not be marketed as such. They are similar to concertos for an Asian instrument and symphony orchestra (e.g., Tan Dun’s *Pipa Concerto*) or Anglo-American rock bands that use non-Western instruments (e.g., the Beatles, Sting, Rusted Root). These are respectively marketed as “classical music” and “pop/rock.” For these reasons, I do not consider these cues in this chapter. A more in-depth discussion of the term “world music” follows.

7. See Neil Lerner, “Music, Race, and Paradoxes of Representation: Jubal Early’s Musical Motif of Barbarism in ‘Objects in Space,’” in *Investigating Firefly and Serenity: Science Fiction on the Frontier*, ed. Rhonda V. Wilcox and Tanya R. Cochran (London: I. B. Tauris, 2008), 183–90; Agnes B. Curry, “We Don’t Say ‘Indian’: On the Paradoxical Construction of the Reavers,” *Slayage: The Online International Journal of Buffy Studies Association* 25 (2008), <http://slayageonline.com/essays/slayage25/Curry.htm>.

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8. Timothy Taylor, *Global Pop: World Music, World Markets* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 3.
9. Philip Sweeney, *The Virgin Directory of World Music* (London: Virgin Books, 1991), ix.
10. Quoted in Timothy Taylor, *Beyond Exoticism: Western Music and the World* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2007), 171.
11. Quoted in Rick Mitchell, “American Tastes Move to World Beat,” *Houston Chronicle*, January 26, 1992, Zest section, 8.
12. Taylor, *Beyond Exoticism*, 172.
13. Taylor, *Beyond Exoticism*, 168.
14. For more on Orientalism in Western classical music, see Ralph Locke, “Constructing the Oriental ‘Other’: Saint-Saëns’s *Samson et Dalila*,” *Cambridge Opera Journal* 3 (1991): 261–302, and Ralph Locke, “Cutthroats and Casbah Dancers, Muezzins and Timeless Sands: Musical Images of the Middle East” in *The Exotic in Western Music*, ed. Jonathan Bellman (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998), 104–36, 326–33.
15. Curry, “We Don’t Say ‘Indian,’” paragraph 25 (accessed October 26, 2008).
16. J. Douglas Rabb and J. Michael Richardson, “Reavers and Redskins: Creating the Frontier Savage,” in *Investigating Firefly*, Wilcox and Cochran.
17. Rabb and Richardson, “Reavers and Redskins,” 138.
18. For a good rebuttal of Rabb and Richardson’s argument, see Curry, “We Don’t Say ‘Indian.’”
19. Helen San, “For the Love of *Firefly*: A Conversation with Composer Greg Edmonson,” *Tracksounds*, www.tracksounds.com/specialfeatures/interviews/interview_greg_edmonson.htm, paragraph 78 (accessed October 26, 2008).
20. Kendra Preston Leonard, “‘The Future Is the Past’: Music and History in *Firefly*,” in *Space and Time: Essays on Visions of History in Science Fiction and Fantasy Television*, ed. David C. Wright and Allen W. Austin (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2009).
21. Rebecca M. Brown, “Orientalism in *Firefly* and *Serenity*,” *Slayage: The Online International Journal of Buffy Studies* 25 (2008), <http://slayageonline.com/essays/slayage25/Brown.htm>, paragraph 24.
22. Deborah Anne Wong, *Speak It Louder: Asian Americans Making Music* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 115.
23. San, “For the Love of *Firefly*,” paragraph 52.
24. Brown, “Orientalism in *Firefly* and *Serenity*,” paragraph 25.
25. In a provocative essay, Dee Amy-Chinn argues that Inara (and I think, by extension, the “whores”) is a throwback to the prefeminist woman. She writes, “In contrast to Zoe and Kaylee who embody the gains of second wave feminism, and whose dress and behaviour reflect the universal valorisation of masculinity associ-

ated with this, Inara is not only feminine—but excessively so. Her appearance is always womanly and over the course of the series she appears dressed in a range of beautiful costumes all of which have an Oriental feel to them, and which are designed to showcase (and thus fetishize) parts of her body. . . . Within the text, her grooming rituals facilitate her location as the object of the male gaze. Perhaps the most voyeuristic scene in the episode ‘Serenity’ is that in which the camera lingers on the naked back of Inara as she ritually cleanses herself with a sponge bath. But this is the classic, rather than the heterosex-positive postfeminist, male gaze proposed by Projansky—as the text offers no evidence that Inara is aware of the camera’s gaze, or is deliberately playing to it in the way that (for example) the gaze is invited by Eva Herzigova in the now iconic Wonderbra ads from the mid-1990s. Hence the power in this scene with Inara lies unequivocally with the viewer, and Inara is cast as the traditional pre-feminist sex object—ensuring that both form and content deny the female viewer a progressive location for engagement with the text.” See Dee Amy-Chinn, “Tis a Pity She’s a Whore: Postfeminist Prostitution in Joss Whedon’s *Firefly*?” *Feminist Media Studies* 6 (2006): 178.

26. Christopher Neal, “Marching out of Step: Music and Otherness in the *Firefly/Serenity* Saga,” in *Investigating Firefly*, Wilcox and Cochran, 194.

27. Neal, “Marching out of Step,” 195.

28. In an interview with Helen San, Edmonson states, “Horn was a very difficult instrument on this show. Joss [Whedon] apparently loved and respected *Star Trek*, but didn’t want to revisit what they had already done. On every other outer space show, the horn is a big deal. That is why, if you’ll notice, anytime we had a shot of the *Serenity* in space, it is always guitar and/or fiddle, never horn. This was the antithesis of *Star Trek*. Does the horn work? Absolutely. But Joss wasn’t remaking *Star Trek*. The Alliance was different. The horn would speak to the powers that be: big, powerful and dwarfing our rag-tag crew in comparison. So we would use the horn for the Alliance.” See San, “For the Love of *Firefly*,” paragraphs 32–33.

29. Taylor, *Beyond Exoticism*, 163.

30. Taylor, *Beyond Exoticism*, 172–73.

31. Quoted in Abbie Bernstein et al., *Firefly: The Official Companion, Volume One* (London: Titan Books, 2006), 84.

32. Bernstein et al., *Firefly: The Official Companion*, 156.

33. San, “For the Love of *Firefly*,” paragraph 52.

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CHAPTER TWELVE

“THE STATUS IS NOT QUO” Gender and Performance in *Dr. Horrible’s Sing-Along Blog*

Kendra Preston Leonard



 *Dr. Horrible’s Sing-Along Blog*, co-written by Joss Whedon, his brothers Zack Whedon and Jed Whedon, and actress Maurissa Tancharoen, was produced during the 2007–2008 Writers Guild of America strike. Filmed and recorded at Joss Whedon’s home and on a small sound stage, the work is a three-act, forty-two-minute film that was released online over six days—one act for every two days—and was thereafter made available for purchase from iTunes and for free viewing on hulu.com. The team also released an online comic book, “Captain Hammer: Be Like Me,” introducing the two main male characters and establishing Captain Hammer’s unintelligent, bigoted superhero persona through publisher Dark Horse prior to the first-episode release as a teaser for viewers.¹ Whedon calls *Dr. Horrible* “your typical internet, superhero musical,” further noting that, “It’s supposed to define the typical superhero musical, by being the first one.”² *Dr. Horrible* was an instant hit: the original distribution site crashed because of heavy traffic, and the soundtrack was number 2 at iTunes USA on the day of its release, later making it to number 39 on the Billboard 200.³ Whedon sums up the plot as follows: “It’s the story of Dr. Horrible, a low-rent super villain trying to make his way in the world, being evil, defeat his nemesis, Captain Hammer, who beats him up on a weekly basis, and work up the courage to talk to the prettiest girl walking around.”⁴ For Dr. Horrible, the goal is, “destroying the status quo, because the status is not quo. The world



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is a mess and I just . . . need to rule it.”⁵ This essay examines the use of codes of musical theater, masculinity, and performance as they relate to the superhero genre and to *Dr. Horrible* in particular.

It is no surprise that constructing and performing masculinity is a near-universal element in traditional superhero comic books and films. Batman and Superman are visually depicted as broad, muscular men, and Superman and Spider-Man are frequently put in the position of saving a physically weaker and needy female. Jeffery Brown has written of Superman that, “As his very name makes clear, Superman is the ultimate masculine ideal of the twentieth century. He can fly faster than the speed of light, cause tidal waves with a puff of breath, see through walls, hear the merest whisper from hundreds of miles away, and squeeze a lump of coal in his bare hands with enough pressure to create a diamond. He is intelligent, kind, handsome, and an ever vigilant defender of truth, justice, and the American way.”⁶ Indeed, Brown suggests, “Classical comic book depictions of masculinity are perhaps the quintessential expression of our cultural beliefs about what it means to be a man.”⁷ What does it mean for such standards of masculinity, then, when the trope of the superhero is transplanted into what is commonly regarded as a primarily gay aesthetic, that of musical theater? As Rebecca A. Rugg has commented, “Is musical theater impossible after gay liberation? Popular culture has digested so many signs of gay culture that it may be impossible to play the signs straight anymore.”⁸

Indeed, attempts to create successful superhero musicals to date have failed. Charles Strouse and Lee Adams’s 1966 *It’s a Bird . . . It’s a Plane . . . It’s Superman* is occasionally resurrected for high school and college shows, but it is considered, by those few individuals who have heard or seen it, a well-intentioned flop with a few good tunes; likewise, the 1998 Warner Bros.-backed *Batman: The Musical* was so riddled with problems that it never even made it to tryouts, despite having popular song composer Jim Steinman and director Tim Burton attached. Although as of the time of this book’s going to press a Spider-Man musical was being prepared with director Julie Taymor and the band U2, and graphic novelist Art Spiegelman and composer Phillip Johnston had completed a first draft of *Drawn to Death: A Three Panel Opera*, which traces the origins of the comic book, the integration of two distinct genres with their own extensive networks of codes and signs remains relatively unproven. The exception is *Dr. Horrible’s Sing-Along Blog*, which, as I will demonstrate, succeeds as both a

musical and as a supervillain origin story precisely because it embraces and plays up the ambiguities of masculinity as a defining factor in both genres.

Dr. Horrible is designed with camp extravagance in mind. In writing about the queering of comic-book superheroes, Rob Lendrum writes that “camp relies on mimesis to destabilize norms, dethrone seriousness, or create humour. Other more radical theories strive to separate from dominant cultural practices in order to create new, alternative countercultural movements.”⁹ By serving as the work’s narrator, Dr. Horrible himself has what Mikko Keskinen calls the “topmost diegetic position,” that of “superior knowledge of the cinematic story and (to a degree) discourse.” Keskinen writes, “[Kaja] Silverman claims that the female voice is closely identified with spectacle and the body, whereas the male voice tends towards invisibility and anonymity; this dichotomy is articulated in Hollywood as the ‘disembodied male voice against the synchronized female voice.’” Yet this is not always the case. Indeed, in *Dr. Horrible’s Sing-Along Blog*, it is the male voices—those of Horrible and Captain Hammer—that are given primary status and are identified with their bodies and powers, while Penny’s voice—she has just two solo songs, one each in act one and act two, and none in act three—is secondary to the story of the two men whose war of egos ultimately lead to her death; ultimately, she is a mere object in the story of Horrible’s origins as a supervillain.¹⁰

By using familiar signs and codes from the world of superhero comics and imbuing them with the queer sensibilities of the musical and a non-traditional narrative approach, *Dr. Horrible’s* writers are able to destabilize the norm of the “intelligent, kind” hero as well as that of the stereotypical evildoer with his deep laugh and secret plans. In fact, *Dr. Horrible* begins with sending up just that aspect of the classic supervillain. The first act, or episode, opens with Neil Patrick Harris as Dr. Horrible looking into his webcam and practicing his evil laugh, noting to his viewers that he’s “working with a vocal coach” to make it deeper and richer. He complains that some villains neglect this important element of performance; at once, Dr. Horrible has set up a paradigm of maleness and performance which remain intertwined throughout the work: he admits to performing masculinity through vocalization, although needing to enhance his masculine performance with lessons from a “vocal coach” also situates him as the stereotypical effeminate man of musical theater.

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Dr. Horrible's masculinity is also countered by the domesticity he projects, frequently but not always when he is in the guise of his alter ego, Billy. In the opening sequence, any evil authority he might still have had after admitting to using a vocal coach is undermined when he reprimands superhero Johnny Snow for trying to force a showdown in Duly Park, parentally saying, "There's kids in that park." Although Dr. Horrible appears in the manner of the classic mad scientist (particularly that of Lex Luthor in early *Superman* comics¹¹) and is dressed in a steampunk-influenced costume composed of goggles, a dresslike doctor's coat, and fencing gloves, the combination of his naïve compassion and his transparency in acting on his desires to present himself as more successful and more "manly" than he actually is ends any pretense that he is anything other than the weaker end of the extremes described by Brown:

Indeed, the split personality implied by the concept of a masquerade seems to be one of the most archetypal metaphors for the masculine condition in Western culture. Whether in Jungian psychology or low-budget horror films, great literary works or modern comic books, masculinity has often explored its own duality. The male identity in the twentieth century is perceived in extremes: man or mouse, He-man or 98-pound weakling. At one end is the hyper-masculine idea with muscles, sex appeal, and social competence; at the other is the skinny, socially inept failure.¹²

Billy is depicted in traditionally feminine spheres: doing the laundry, blogging from the kitchen (here two traditionally feminine areas overlap: that of communication and speech and that of the kitchen), and sharing frozen yogurt with his crush, Penny, played by Felicia Day. The musical numbers assigned to Billy are also "feminized" in relation to those sung when he is in the guise of Dr. Horrible through use of musical styles commonly regarded as gendered. His first song, which begins when he is in Dr. Horrible garb answering fan e-mail on his blog, instead primarily features Billy in street clothes, singing in a light tenor:

Laundry day
See you there
Under things
Tumbling

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Wanna say
Love your hair
Here I go
Mumbling¹³

As the song continues, Billy and Dr. Horrible are shown in alteration. Horrible sings about his freeze ray that will stop time, and Billy takes the lyrics that describe his feelings for Penny and his desire to spend more time with her. As the two personas alternate, so does Harris’s vocal presentation, singing with more volume and a richer chest voice for Dr. Horrible, who poses villainously with the freeze ray, and reverting to a lighter timbre and using his head voice for Billy, who continues doing laundry. This first solo and the scene immediately after it establish that while Billy / Dr. Horrible has primarily homosocial relationships—he has a male roommate named Moist, who is a villain henchman—he desires a heterosexual relationship with Penny; but his heretofore homosocial life has not prepared him to speak comfortably with her or approach her as a potential partner. Dr. Horrible also aspires to join the Evil League of Evil, an apparently male-dominated organization represented by a trio of singing (male) cowboys who pass on threats from their leader, Bad Horse: if Dr. Horrible doesn’t come through with a “heinous crime, a show of force / (a murder would be nice of course),” Bad Horse will “make [Horrible] his mare.” The threat additionally serves to position Horrible as the weaker, feminized “bottom” in relation to the presumably more masculine and more successful villains of the Evil League. Further, Horrible’s relationship with his nemesis, whom he terms “Captain Hammer, corporate tool,” is portrayed as exceptionally one-sided, with Horrible always on the receiving end of Captain Hammer’s violence. Despite Horrible’s attempts, especially when he is acting as a supervillain, to perform traditional superhero masculinity or with masculine traits, he is repeatedly shown to be the weaker or more “feminine” of the two men.

In the song “A Man’s Gotta Do,” Captain Hammer (played by Nathan Fillion) is introduced, a muscular man wearing cargo pants, black gloves, and a close-fitting, short-sleeved T-shirt with a hammer on the chest. Dr. Horrible is remotely hijacking a van when Captain Hammer lands on its roof and destroys Horrible’s control device, sending the van careening along city streets and threatening Penny. Horrible manages to

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stop the van remotely, but Hammer takes the credit and uses the opportunity to impress Penny. Horrible hates the thought that he has “introduced my arch-nemesis to the girl of my dreams,” but carries on with his heist of the van’s contents. In their trio, Horrible places professionalism above individuality or personal interests, focusing on a successful heist so that Bad Horse will admit him into the Evil League of Evil. At the same time, Hammer uses the event to parade his successfully performed masculinity in front of female spectators and Penny, in the guise of just doing what “he’s gotta do.”

The introduction of the trio is sung by Horrible in a gentle, balladlike style, which is interrupted by Hammer as he lands on the roof of the van. With Hammer’s interruption, the music changes from Horrible’s gentle ballad to a rhythmically and harmonically faster rock style, complete with wailing electric guitars. As Alexandra Apolloni has pointed out, “Rock music has been traditionally viewed as an expression of masculinity”; the appearance of Captain Hammer and his position as both the dominant musical force and the dominant actor in the trio leads to the creation of two disparate performances of masculinity: the solitary, accomplishment-driven Dr. Horrible and the narcissistic, smug Captain Hammer.¹⁴ Hammer is the essence of hypermasculinized camp—a term that, as Vanessa Knights has noted, traces its etymological roots to the French *se camper*, meaning self-conscious posturing.¹⁵ Although his entrance begins with a statement of modesty—“Stand back everyone, nothing here to see”—it soon becomes clear that the modesty is false and that the spotlight is exactly what Hammer wants and is, in fact, prepared for:

Just imminent danger, in the middle of it, me
Yes, Captain Hammer’s here, hair blowing in the breeze
And the day needs my saving expertise.

After throwing Penny into a pile of garbage bags to get her out of the way of the van, and the van stops, he continues, above and on top of Penny’s thanks: “When you’re the best, you can’t rest, what’s the use / There’s ass needs kicking, some ticking bomb to defuse / The only doom that’s looming is you loving me to death.” Hammer asserts his masculinity over Horrible’s as Hammer grabs Horrible by the throat, saying, “It’s curtains for

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you, Dr. Horrible. Lacy, gently wafting curtains,” assigning Horrible to both physical domination and a feminized death. As Hammer continues to sing and Penny joins in thanking him, he stands with his back to her and ignores her lyrics and performance, instead holding one hand to an ear as if checking his own pitch. Hammer turns to Penny only at the end of the trio, as Horrible makes off with the contents of the van and Penny and Hammer both sing about her love for Hammer.

The trio establishes that Hammer’s masculinity is as much a performance as Horrible’s, although Hammer sincerely believes in his own moral and physical superiority. In the first episode alone, Horrible and Hammer are cast as two sides of a stereotypical masculine persona: Horrible admits feelings of responsibility and a need to appear mature, while Hammer represents the hubris that can accompany physical strength and public support. Although Niall Richardson has written that in traditional comics, “the villains of the superhero narratives always want the exact opposite [of the heroes]: self-aggrandizement and world domination,” these first-act performances of Hammer and Horrible establish that both men seek these ends.¹⁶

Act two opens with a duet between Dr. Horrible and Penny in which Horrible, dressed as Billy, stalking the dark streets of L.A., sings of his desire to take over the world for its own betterment, while Penny, eating dinner with Captain Hammer at a soup kitchen, sings of her equal desire to improve the world, albeit by different means, in “My Eyes.” Although silent, Hammer is shown as a superficial cad, unwilling to interact with or be touched by the homeless diners to whom Penny is dedicated. The music for the duet clearly separates Penny and Horrible’s approaches to changing the world, despite their shared social concerns. His lyrics begin with short, monosyllabic bites set to a marching tempo with a rhythmically repeating, highly percussive, minor-key accompaniment that could be attributed to Philip Glass or Steve Reich. His anger is audible:

Any dolt with half a brain
Can see that humankind has gone insane
To the point where I don’t know
If I’ll upset the status quo
If I throw poison in the water main

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The music framing Penny—and by extension, Captain Hammer—follows the same essential harmonic structure as Horrible’s music but is accompanied by a soft-rock background, including a simple bass line on guitar and a shimmer on a cymbal, a sound more common of female pop artists than their male counterparts. Penny’s presence, then, can be read as “feminizing”: each of Horrible’s subsequent verses becomes gradually more lyrical and the accompaniment becomes more similar to hers. After their solo first verses, Horrible and Penny sing together as he watches her from afar while she goes on a date with Captain Hammer. In this second stanza, Horrible’s musical style changes to match hers: his earlier, “masculine,” martial accompaniment is replaced with the soft-rock accompaniment first heard in Penny’s solo stanza, tempering his anger and evening out his projection, and his diction changes from the clipped, angry delivery of his first stanza to a more elided performance, especially as their stanzas begin to end on the same words: “heart,” “sound,” “(a)part,” and “(a/g)round.” Finally, in the final stanza, Horrible’s final verse and Penny’s final verse overlap both textually and musically for all but a few key words:

Dr. Horrible

I cannot believe my eyes
How the world’s filled with filth
and lies
But it’s plain to see
Evil inside of me is on the rise

Penny

I cannot believe my eyes
How the world’s finally growing
wise
And it’s plain to see
Rapture inside of me is on the rise

Horrible’s plan to use the freeze ray for the first time is thwarted by Hammer, who throws a car at his head, and the cowboy envoys of Bad Horse appear again, telling Horrible that “now assassination is just the only way” to enter the Evil League of Evil. Horrible struggles with the concept of murder, telling Moist that, “Killing’s not elegant or creative, it’s not my style.” The concepts of elegance and creativity in relation to his work further cast Horrible into the traditional feminine sphere, and his lack of sexually aggressive masculinity is reinforced during his conversation with Penny at the Laundromat: he speaks to her as a female friend rather than an interested male, offering her yogurt and asking casually about her date with Hammer.

When Hammer tells Horrible of his plans for having sex with Penny, couched in over-the-top tough-guy language (“I’m gonna give Penny the

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night of her life, just because you want her. And I get what you want. See Penny’s giving it up, she’s giving it up hard. Cause she’s with Captain Hammer. And these [he raises his gloved fists] are not the hammer. [Pause] The hammer is my penis.”), it sparks Horrible’s most emphatic performance of masculinity in the song “Brand New Day.” “Brand New Day,” which borrows heavily from the form of *Sweeney Todd*’s “No Place Like London,” opens with a rapid patter over a thumping bass beat as Horrible finds his perfect murder target in Hammer:

This appeared as a moral dilemma 'cause at first
It was weird, though I swore to eliminate the worst
Of the plague that devoured humanity, it's true
I was vague on the “how”—so how can it be that you
Have shown me the light

The chorus, an aggressively straightforward declaration of hostility, is accompanied by heavy percussion and guitars in the style of pop punk; despite the Sondheim-influenced textual approach, the music is obviously indebted to Green Day and The Offspring.

It's a brand new day
And the sun is high
All the birds are singing
That you're gonna die

As Horrible sings, the visuals offer a montage of his various physical beatings by Hammer: in front of tourists taking photos, in the rain, in front of a Salvation Army Santa Claus. Later he is shown sitting in a giant chair, where he looks like a precocious child; finally he imagines himself the giant, stomping through L.A. and squashing Captain Hammer. The implication is obvious: no more “girly” 98-pound weakling for Horrible.

In his performance of “Brand New Day,” Billy’s transformation from “laundry buddy” to Dr. Horrible and his fantasy of towering over everyone—normal citizens and his nemesis alike—is a reminder of the goals and philosophy he expressed in “A Man’s Gotta Do.” Just as Hammer has objectified Penny from the beginning, Horrible now sees her as objectified as well: she is desired by both hero and villain, but only, at this point, because the other also covets her. The visual sequence that accompanies

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“Brand New Day” asserts Horrible’s masculinity as ultimately jealous and misogynistic; he is no longer singing about improving the world through his (benevolent) dictatorship, but about destroying another man over a woman. “Brand New Day” signifies a turning point in Horrible’s origin story, one so crucial that the music reappears at the end of act three as the newly outwardly suave and macho Horrible steps into his new role as a member of the Evil League of Evil.

Hammer does not sing at all during the second act. Aside from his dialogue with Penny and Horrible at the Laundromat, he is mute, reduced to two alternating visual tropes that repeatedly depict him as both slightly feminized—he is squeamish and fearful of everyday encounters—and hyper-masculinized, by showing off his powers to Penny. Hammer backs away from the homeless at the soup kitchen and brushes off his shoulder after one man has touched him, and he cringes and moves away from ducks as he and Penny sit by a lake; at the same time, he displays his super-speed and super-strength by paddling a paddleboat at high speeds around the lake, and implies that he has used brute force to make the mayor sign over a building to Penny’s homeless advocacy group. The new trope in act two that displays his occasional inability to perform masculinity prepares the audience for the complete reversal of gender roles between Hammer and Horrible in the final act.

Act three opens with Hammer and Penny preparing for the opening of the homeless shelter and the unveiling of a statue of Captain Hammer. While Penny’s brief lines in “So They Say” focus on the shelter, Hammer sings about his newfound glory as a political crusader—singing “Thanks to *me!*” as Penny praises his help—and as Penny’s lover:

This is so nice
Just might sleep with the same girl twice
They say it’s better the second time
They say you get to do the weird stuff

While Penny has second thoughts about her relationship with Hammer:

There’s no happy ending
So they say
Should I stop pretending
Or is this a brand new day

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Dr. Horrible faces the reality of the consequences of his plan to kill him:

There's no happy ending
So they say
Not for me anyway
Stop pretending
Take the chance to build a brand new day

Hammer's narcissism comes to a head in his act-three solo, “Everyone's a Hero.” The song sends up the notion of the hero in everyone, a common comic trope. Brown writes,

Superhero comics have always relied on the notion that a superman exists inside every man, and while the readers are well aware of this most fundamental convention, they are also aware that several new and incredibly popular comics are erasing the ordinary man underneath in favor of an even more excessively powerful and one-dimensional masculine ideal.¹⁷

Hammer sums up the concept that the hero in every man has become lessened, while the superheroes keep getting stronger, in the first chorus of his ballad:

Everyone's a hero in their own way
Everyone's got villains they must face
They're not as cool as mine
But folks, you know it's fine to know your place
Everyone's a hero in their own way
In their own not-that-heroic way.

Hammer uses the ballad not only to establish his dominant heroic position, but also to reinforce his performance of masculinity. He sings, “So I thank my girlfriend, Penny / (yeah, we totally had sex)” in order to establish his heterosexual practices and activity; claims himself to be a lawful authority by designating himself “poverty's new sheriff”; and brushes aside fears and concerns that would make him less of a man by singing, “A hero doesn't care / If you're a bunch of scary alcoholic bums.” At the end of his song, Hammer is frozen by Horrible's freeze ray, accompanied by Horrible's now-deep and practiced laugh. When the freeze ray's effect wears

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off and Hammer is reanimated, he pauses to finish the final cadence of his song—the ultimate act of hubris—before beginning to struggle with Horrible over the death ray, ostensibly to protect those in the room.

Horrible’s climactic song, “Slipping,” is the musical progeny of “Brand New Day.” Beginning with the same kind of *Sprechstimme* that opened “Brand New Day,” “Slipping” is Horrible’s invective against Hammer as well as the unthinking masses gathered to praise him as a hero: “Look at these people—amazing how sheep’ll / Show up for the slaughter.” To the accompaniment of drums and heavy accents, Horrible continues: “Go ahead—run away / Say it was horrible,” projecting confidence and terrible anger. He is reconciled to the need for a deadly—and thus manly—show of force; although still protective and possessive of Penny, he hopes to shield her from his crime until he can show her the social change that comes out of it:

No sign of Penny—good.
I would give anything not to have her see
It’s gonna be bloody—head up Billy buddy
There’s no time for mercy
Here goes—no mercy . . .

Horrible’s performance in “Slipping” is forced by his jealousy of Hammer and Penny and by his desire to prove himself, both characteristics socially coded as acceptable as part of masculine behavior. His singing in “Slipping” goes uninfluenced by Penny’s moderating presence as it was in “My Eyes”; it remains martial in nature as Horrible parades through the homeless shelter with the death ray, firing it into the ceiling in a show of power. Although he pauses one last time before his final iteration of “no mercy,” he is prepared to follow through with his plan, even after the freeze ray fails and Hammer punches him to the floor.

The death ray, damaged in Horrible’s fall, explodes in Hammer’s hands, knocking Hammer across the room and throwing shrapnel, some of which hits Penny with fatal results. For Hammer, this is the first time he has felt pain, and his macho posturing comes undone as he screams, “I’m in pain! I think this is what pain feels like. Oh mama, someone maternal!” and bolts, crying, from the room. Penny dies in Horrible’s arms, telling him that “Captain Hammer will save us,” and Horrible’s origin story comes to an end.

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When Hammer leaves the scene without thinking of Penny or anyone else, he fails what Richardson calls the superhero masculinity test:

While the superhero narrative tests the superhero’s masculinity—usually to the point of near destruction—his ordeals are not simply a trial so that he can win his princess. For example, the Superman films clearly posit Lois Lane as the object of desire, yet Superman’s battles are always for the greater good of mankind and not to win his princess. Superman offers an image of supreme masculine strength that is conflated with equally perfect goodness. Superman is self-sacrificing; he performs good deeds simply for the benefit of mankind and not for personal gain.¹⁸

Indeed, Hammer is next seen on a therapist’s couch, shaking and cowering, while TV anchors lament his first-ever absence from his job as a superhero. Horrible, on the other hand, carries Penny’s body to the morgue gurney that bears her away, and while he is emotionally devastated, it is clear that his remorse will fuel his ambitions to follow through and create “social change / Anarchy—that I run.” His final song, “Everything You Ever,” focuses on what his achievement in evil has cost him personally. Recalling Horrible’s earlier anger, it draws on the repetitive piano figures from Horrible’s accompaniment in “My Eyes” in its first section, and then becomes the background for a party-mix style musical montage that also includes “Brand New Day” as Horrible makes his way through a victory celebration, changes into a new, red-and-black costume, and is admitted into a private room where the Evil League of Evil awaits him. During the bridge between these sections, Horrible is shown as a resigned but fully competent villain, emptying a bank with Moist. Both Hammer’s camp heroic masculinity and Horrible’s overemphasized feminine “weaknesses” have been destroyed. The mix itself aurally represents the newly (mostly) rejected “feminine” or compassionate and newly exaggerated masculine elements of Horrible’s post-Penny persona: “Everything You Ever” allows him to experience private grief, while an instrumental version of “Brand New Day” and the “Dr. Horrible Theme Music” herald his entry into the league and all that it stands for. In the last shot of act three, Horrible, dressed in Billy’s clothes, admits, unaccompanied, to his webcam that despite his ostensible victory and emergence as a deadly supervillain, he won’t feel “a thing.”

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By casting the villain's origin story, a classic element in comics, as a musical, the writers of both text and music of *Dr. Horrible* were able to subvert the expectations of viewers even a little familiar with the genre. *Dr. Horrible's Sing-Along Blog* plays heavily on feelings of nostalgia for the golden age of comics (1938–1956¹⁹), in which “men were men” and heroes were always morally perfect: in Richardson's words: “[Superman] protects the innocent simply because it is the right thing to do. He is the idealized hero.”²⁰ Rugg notes that using nostalgia—even nostalgia for a fantasized present—is a powerful tool in drawing in audiences and creating compelling storytelling. “On the surface, musicals present a historically simplified America,” she writes. “However, history's social and political complications seep through the cracks in those famous and oft-revived examples of the form, *Show Boat* (1927) and *Oklahoma!* (1943), and also in many more recent productions—*Kiss Me Kate*, *Chicago*, *The Music Man*, *Annie Get Your Gun*, *42nd Street*, *Seussical*, *The Full Monty*, and *Follies*. Throughout the twentieth century, two modes of nostalgia—cultural and personal—have been employed in the dramaturgy of musical theater.” By framing *Dr. Horrible* in the musical tradition of classic musical theater but also acknowledging its many more contemporary influences, such as *Rent* and the newly repopularized *Sweeney Todd*, *Dr. Horrible's* writers create a safe space for the camp and ambiguities of gender upon which the work relies for characterization of its male leads.

The types of the songs themselves support this construction of *Dr. Horrible* as a play on gender roles both onstage and within the superhero comic genre. Stacy Wolf notes that in musicals of the 1940s and 1950s, “gender difference, then, signifies all difference, and heterosexual union, which culminates in the requisite romantic duet and then the choral finale, signifies the unification of the entire community.” *Dr. Horrible*, although using nostalgia to call up and parody these older styles of musicals, deliberately rejects this formula, as it does a happy, heteronormative ending. Penny and Horrible sing a duet, although not to each other. After their brief duet in act one, Penny and Hammer never sing to each other at the same time again, although Penny sings to Hammer. Finally, Hammer and Horrible never address each other in song, eliminating what Wolf delineates as the homosocial argument against any heterosexual pairings, citing “the better fit within their respective homosocial spheres, which are represented through singly

gendered chorus numbers, trios, and duets,” but also perhaps avoiding any potential for signifiers of homosocial accord to become or be read as those of homosexual desire.²¹ Both in situations when their masculinity is being performed successfully and those in which they are musically feminized by aspects external to their own implied desires, Horrible and Hammer sing alone. Wolf continues, writing that the conventional musical’s plot devices of pairing off heterosexual partners frequently fails: “In most integrated musicals, the second act consists primarily of reprises that wrap up the heterosexual narrative. This structure, as I have argued elsewhere, renders the musical’s heterosexual romance plot weak, frequently unconvincing, and utterly dependent on heteronormative cultural conventions and expectations for its believability (even in the not-so-believable world of musical theater).”²² In its design as an origin story as well as a send-up of traditional gender roles both in classic musicals and in the comic genres, *Dr. Horrible* rejects this narrative for the grittier, unhappy ending of many superhero origin comics, providing it with a stronger narrative than perhaps either genre could have done alone.²³ By constructing a work that deconstructs expectations and role reversals in terms of superhero/villain sensibilities and masculinity, and the narratives of musical theater, Tancharoen and the three Whedon brothers successfully created a space in which camp can find common ground with pathos, leading to a complex and compelling origin story for Dr. Horrible.

Notes

1. www.myspace.com/darkhorsepresents?issuenum=12&storynum=2.
2. Prodigeeek, “Prodigeek Interview: Joss Whedon on Dr. Horrible’s Sing-Along Blog part 1,” July 7, 2008. http://mikecs.net/prodigeek/2008/07/07/dr_horrible_interview_part_1/ (accessed October 31, 2008).
3. “Dr Horrible Soundtrack a Big Hit,” Dr. Horrible’s Sing-Along Blog Official Site, www.drhorrible.com (accessed September 2, 2008).
4. Prodigeeek, “Prodigeek Interview: Joss Whedon on Dr. Horrible’s Sing-Along Blog part 1,” July 7, 2008. http://mikecs.net/prodigeek/2008/07/07/dr_horrible_interview_part_1/ (accessed October 31, 2008).
5. All transcriptions of spoken dialogue are by the author.
6. Jeffrey Brown, “Comic Book Masculinity and the New Black Superhero,” *African American Review* 33, no. 1 (spring 1999): 31.

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7. Brown, quoted in Valerie Palmer-Mehta and Kellie Hay, "A Superhero for Gays?: Gay Masculinity and Green Lantern," *Journal of American Culture* 28, no. 4 (December 2005): 392.

8. Rebecca Ann Rugg, "What It Used to Be: Nostalgia and the State of the Broadway Musical," *Theater* 32, no. 2 (summer 2002): 48.

9. Rob Lendrum, "Queering Super-Manhood: The Gay Superhero in Contemporary Mainstream Comic Books," *Journal for the Arts, Sciences, and Technology* 2, no. 2 (2004): 72.

10. Mikko Keskinen, "Her Mistress's Voice: Gynophonocentrism in Feminist Discourses," *Journal of International Women's Studies* 2, no. 1 (November 2000), www.bridgew.edu/SOAS/jiws/nov00/a_gynoft.htm (accessed November 3, 2008).

11. Luthor's first appearance was as a scientific genius in *Action Comics #23*, as noted in Les Daniels, *Superman: The Complete History: The Life and Times of the Man of Steel* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1998), 13.

12. Brown, "Comic Book Masculinity," 25.

13. All lyrics are quoted from "Dr. Horrible's Sing-Along Blog (Soundtrack from the Motion Picture)," <http://drhorrible.com/linernotes.html> (accessed November 3, 2008).

14. Alexandra Apolloni, "Rebel Grrls in the Classroom: Vocality, Empowerment and Feminist Pedagogy at Rock and Roll Schools for Girls," <http://repositories.cdlib.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1069&context=csw>, 4–5 (accessed November 11, 2008).

15. Andrew Ross, *No Respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture* (London: Routledge, 1989), 157. Cited in Vanessa Knights, "Tears and Screams: Performances of Pleasure and Pain in the Bolero," presented at the 12th Biennial Conference of the International Association for the Study of Popular Music, July 3–7, 2003, www.ncl.ac.uk/sacs/POP/papers/montrealvkpop.pdf (accessed November 3, 2008).

16. Niall Richardson, "The Gospel According to Spider-Man," *Journal of Popular Culture* 37, no. 4 (2004): 694.

17. Brown, "Comic Book Masculinity," 26.

18. Richardson, "Gospel According to Spider-Man," 694.

19. The golden age is generally considered to last from the first appearance of Superman in 1928 to the revitalization of the Flash in 1956. Introduction, "Help is on the Way! Comic Books and Superheroes in Special Collections," *ImageText: Interdisciplinary Comics Studies*, www.english.ufl.edu/imagetext/archives/exhibit1/dc.shtml (accessed November 4, 2008).

20. Introduction, "Help is on the Way!"

21. Stacy Wolf, “‘We’ll Always Be Bosom Buddies’: Female Duets and the Queering of Broadway Musical Theater,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 12, no. 3 (2006): 353.

22. Wolf, “‘We’ll Always Be Bosom Buddies,’” 62.

23. Deaths in superhero comics include those of Elektra; pre-Crisis Supergirl; Spider-Man’s first major love interest, Gwen Stacy; Batman’s sidekick Robin; Captain America’s sidekick Bucky; and Barry Allen as the Flash. For more on the disproportionate deaths, depowerments, and destructions of female characters in the superhero genre, see Gail Simone, *Women in Refrigerators*, www.unheardtaunts.com/wir/index.html.

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