REEL MUSIC
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EXPLORING 100 YEARS OF FILM MUSIC
ROGER HICKMAN

Reel Music

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EXPLORING 100 YEARS OF FILM MUSIC

SECOND EDITION

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To David and Evan

Thank you for your innocence and the sense of awe and amazement that you bring to the world.

Wishing my grandchildren joyful lives filled with the magic of movies and music.

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PREFACE

Music is all around us. It accompanies many of our daily activities, such as driving, shopping, and exercising, and we use it to enrich a wide range of emotional experiences, from marriages to funerals, religious services to frat parties, political conventions to romantic evenings. But despite its significant role in our lives, music is often heard but not listened to.

The term "listen" suggests the active participation of the verbal mind. Certainly attentive listening adds to the aural experience of music, but discounting the simple act of hearing neglects one of music's most important attributes—the ability to touch our emotions without engaging our brains. It is this quality that makes music such an integral element of film: music can generate emotional responses while the mind is focused elsewhere, on dialogue, plot, or action. Indeed, music in film has been described as the "invisible art."

When I ask my students what they think of the music in current movies, many of them just stare back at me blankly. This observation is not intended to be critical of my students, but rather to show how subtly music works within the setting of a movie. So, when I ask students to write about music in film, I suggest that they watch the movie first without paying much attention to the music. After they've analyzed what qualities make the film unique, they can then go back and look for ways that the music contributed to those qualities. By refocusing our attention on the music, we can learn more about both the movies we love and the music that drives our everyday lives.

Like any book designed for a music appreciation class, *Reel Music* introduces a number of concepts that can be applied to a wide variety of music. Topics such as themes, thematic transformation, dissonance, timbre, style, and emotions—all part of many musical experiences—may be more readily grasped in the context of a film than with abstract music. Throughout your study of film music, you should ask yourself why the director and composer made certain choices: Were they successful in achieving their goals? What alternatives might they have chosen? In this way, you will expand your critical-thinking capabilities and accumulate tools that you can apply when listening to music of all types.

Since most of the material in this book is organized in a chronological fashion, you will also learn a good deal about film history, including general information on trends and specific information about a number of representative films. In selecting the films for this study, I have avoided defining the qualities of a great film score *a priori* and then limiting the book's scope to reflect my judgment. (It would be easy, for example, for a music historian to focus only on those films that have a musical approach similar to the conception of theatrical music by Richard Wagner.) Rather, I have sought out the most highly regarded films from any given period and examined how they use music. Hence, our coverage includes movies with nontraditional and non-symphonic music.

The foremost goal of this text is to study how music functions in a given film, regardless of its musical style. In the process, you will discover that music establishes psychological moods, guides our emotions, and reveals aspects of an unfolding narrative. By the end of this study, you will have gained a greater understanding of both music and film, and you may never watch or listen to another movie in quite the same way again.

THE SECOND EDITION: WHAT'S NEW?

- Over a decade of movies have appeared since the first edition of *Reel Music* came out. In the final four chapters (films since 2001), discussions focus on rising young composers, important musical trends, and major new film scores. Among the latter are winners of the Oscar for Best Score, such as *Up* (2009), *The Social Network* (2010), and *The Hateful Eight* (2015); Best Picture winners, including *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008), *Argo* (2012), and *Birdman* (2014); and box-office hits, highlighted by *Inception* (2010), *The Avengers* (2012), and *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* (2016).
- The historical overview also extends earlier. The previous edition introduced students to the prehistory of film music exclusively with Richard Wagner. Though it is appropriate to pay homage to this great master of the theater and music drama, the influences of other composers and theatrical dramas should be considered as well. Chapter 4, "Forerunners of Film Music," traces musical conventions to earlier periods of Western music history and describes the influences of and parallels to theatrical genres such as ballet and melodramas.
- The second edition covers significantly more international films. The primary focus is still on Hollywood—the movies that students most

frequently encounter—but these films are now placed within a world context. Among the international films added to *Reel Music* are *La Strada* (1956), *Elevator to the Gallows* (1958), *Once Upon a Time in the West* (1968), *Aguirre, The Wrath of* God (1972), *Babette's Feast* (1987), *Three Colors: Blue* (1993), *Spirited Away* (2001), and *The Artist* (2011).

- The number of Viewer Guides has more than doubled, from 24 to 68, expanding the coverage of iconic scenes and allowing for greater flexibility in choosing films to study.
- Each chapter now includes suggestions for discussion topics, activities, and readings. The activities can be completed in class or assigned as outside work. Among the discussion topics are numerous questions that make good study guides and essay prompts for exams.

TEXT OVERVIEW

Reel Music is designed for non-music and non-film majors at the university level. Majors in music and film can also benefit from instruction based on this text, but a strong background in either of the two disciplines is not required. The body of the text can be divided into two uneven sections: the introduction (Part 1) and the historical overview (Parts 2–7). Each part has four chapters.

Entitled "Exploring Film and Music," Part 1 can be discussed in class or assigned as homework. It is suggested that some class time be spent assisting non-music majors with the concepts of music and how music is used in films. Throughout the text, music examples are included for reference. (For ease of following while listening, I have simplified some of these. The principal theme for *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial,* for example, is shown with eighth notes rather than the more visually complicated—and accurate—sixteenth notes.) Non-majors are encouraged to follow the notation so they can use this tool in their studies.

The four introductory chapters of Part 1 address the following topics:

Chapter 1 ("Drama and Film") presents basic concepts and terminology of drama and film.

Chapter 2 ("Elements of Music") focuses on musical terminology for non-music majors and includes a section on reading music notation.

Chapter 3 ("Listening to Film Music") examines how music functions in a film.

Chapter 4 ("Forerunners of Film Music") provides an overview of descriptive music in Western music history, with particular focus on opera, ballet, and melodrama.

In each of the historical units that follow in Parts 2–7, the text divides film music into periods of varying lengths. The divisions between these sections are sometimes delineated by significant technological and historical events, and sometimes by stylistic shifts. Individual chapters focus on trends, genres, composers, or subperiods. The last chapter of each part discusses international films. Numerous Composer Profiles provide basic lists of films, and Close-Up boxes discuss nonmusical issues that may be of interest to burgeoning film connoisseurs.

FOR THE INSTRUCTOR

Film is a temporal art and, as such, occupies time during a lecture. Just as it is difficult to imagine a poetry class in which no poems are read or a music class in which no music is heard, so too is it difficult to imagine this class with no time dedicated to viewing part of a film. How much time to devote to watching films is a decision for each instructor. The Viewer Guides contain timings that will aid the instructor in class or the student at home. Since VHS tapes, DVDs, and online streaming sources (such as Netflix) have minor discrepancies, allow for some variation from the timings given in the book.

This text was created for a semester-long course comprising forty-five hours of lecture time. One could devote a single hour lecture to each chapter, which would allow for exam times and extra lecture time on chapters of the instructor's choice. For those teaching ninety-minute classes, as I do, some modifications are necessary. After completing the discussions of the Part 1 material, a quiz might be appropriate. Thereafter, you can divide the historical survey into two parts (with one midterm and a final) after Part 4, or into three (two midterms and a final) with breaks after Parts 3 and 5.

Variations can be made on this simple outline to devote time to an instructor's area of interest. Since Part 1 is written as a reference tool for students, it may not require as much lecture time. Similarly, the silent era (Part 2) has fewer films with original music and could be taught in less than six hours. The instructor may choose to apply these additional lecture hours to later units, where examples are more abundant. The discussions of music for international films are significantly more substantial, but they are isolated in single chapters. If one so chooses, these chapters can be omitted from a survey.

Film music can provide numerous opportunities for evaluating students' critical thinking, in both class discussions and written papers. Discussions can be lively—almost everyone has opinions about film. Ask your students to talk

about the mood that music creates and how that mood is achieved. Encourage students to use precise terminology in defending their views.

You can challenge students' listening and critical-thinking skills by asking specific questions: Why does the film *Rebel Without a Cause* use dissonant sounds? Why did John Williams choose to feature a solo violin in *Schindler's List*? I have enjoyed many classroom debates over the issue of music in *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Show the opening ("The Dawn of Man") as is, without music, and then repeat the scene along with a recording of Alex North's original score. Have them discuss how the music changes the impact and argue about which approach is more successful. With more-recent films, you could ask about the effect of minimalism in films such as *Inception,* the divergent approaches to scoring for the series of *Star Wars* and *The Lord of the Rings* movies, and the differences between the three action scenes featured in the book—*The Adventures of Robin Hood, Raiders of the Lost Ark,* and *Skyfall*.

Each instructor will have his or her own ideas about written projects. Try to avoid asking students to write biographies or plot descriptions. The Viewer Guides in this text are not meant to be models for student papers. Encourage them to devise a thesis that they can support in a formal writing assignment. In preparation for their analyses, you might assign the *Build Your Own Viewer Guide* exercise at the end of Chapter 6.

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1

EXPLORING FILM AND MUSIC

Drama and Film

1

Moving pictures allow for the combination of visual arts with both drama and music, as suggested in this scene from *Singin' in the Rain* (1952).

In the late nineteenth century, technology paved the way for a new type of artwork—moving pictures. Once pictures moved, they occupied time; once they occupied time, the visual arts crossed into the realm of the temporal arts, thereby enabling creative artists to combine visual images with both drama

and music. The complex interconnection of the diverse arts found in movies is a topic that is too broad for this text. Yet the study of film music necessitates an understanding of how music functions within a dramatic framework. Hence, we will consider some of the basic elements of drama and film before proceeding to those of music in Chapter 2.

ELEMENTS OF DRAMA

Most people go to the movies to be entertained. Some prefer action and fantasy, some enjoy comedies and human dramas, and, of course, many simply choose a film depending on their current mood, the actors, and the quality of the production. All of these kinds of movies share one common element—they tell a story. When a movie relates a story, it is considered to be a **narrative film**. There are other types of films, such as documentaries and art movies, but these are beyond the scope of our text. This limitation does not imply that there is less art in these other types. Indeed, some of the most critically acclaimed films are not narratives, and many of these have strong musical support.

Narrative films are the principal product of the modern movie industry. Many of their stories are original, stemming from the imagination of a creative writer. But quite frequently, legends (*Braveheart*, 1995), history (*Bridge of Spies*, 2015), or current events (*Argo*, 2012) serve as inspiration for the storyteller. A substantial number of narrative films are adaptations of existing stories, including novels (*The Great Gatsby*, 2013), short stories (*2001: A Space Odyssey*, 1968), plays (*A Streetcar Named Desire*, 1951), poems (*The Charge of the Light Brigade*, 1936), comic books (*Guardians of the Galaxy*, 2014), and even earlier films (*The Magnificent Seven*, 1960).

Western drama can be described in terms of its basic elements. Since the time of Aristotle's *Poetics* (c. 350 BCE), numerous and varied interpretations of these fundamental qualities have appeared. For our limited purposes, we will discuss five aspects that are frequently associated with drama: plot, character, setting, theme, and mood.

Plot

Stories can be told in a variety of ways. Some simply start at the beginning and continue until the story is over. Others incorporate jumps in time or location that reveal important information about the story. The structure of a story is called the **plot**. The plot provides the basic framework for the drama and for the temporal unfolding of the artwork.

Two basic plot structures are commonly encountered in Western fiction—causal and episodic (TABLE I.1). The **causal plot** contains four principal sections:

- *Exposition*: the background information necessary for the story to unfold
- *Complications*: a series of events stemming from a conflict; each complication leads to the next, generally building in dramatic intensity
- *Climax*: the moment of greatest tension, when the complications come to a head
- *Resolution* (or *denouement*): the end of the story, in which the complications are resolved, and the loose ends are tied together

TABLE I.1 Traditional plot structures

CAUSAL PLOT	EPISODIC PLOT
Exposition	Exposition
Complications	Episodes
Climax	Climax
Resolution	Resolution

FIGURE I.1 A scrolled prologue provides the essential background material of an exposition in *Star Wars*.

Two of Hollywood's most popular films provide examples of the causal plot: *Star Wars* (1977) and *The Godfather* (1974). In George Lucas's initial venture into the *Star Wars* series, little time is used for the exposition. One could argue that it is given during the scrolled prologue. Once the film begins, the action takes off. The first complication is the attack on the rebel ship by the Imperial fleet. This leads to an extended series of other complications that climax with the destruction of the Death Star. For the resolution, the heroes of the action are honored in a grand ceremony. By contrast, *The Godfather* has an extended exposition that includes the interaction with a Hollywood film director, which is essentially unrelated to the central story. Once the Godfather refuses to help the other mobs to deal drugs, complications build on each other directly until Michael assumes the role as the new Godfather at the climax.

FIGURE I.2 The Hollywood mansion of a movie director serves as the setting for a portion of the exposition in *The Godfather*.

Although the **episodic plot** is similar to the causal plot in a number of respects, the difference between the two approaches is significant. Rather than moving through a series of complications, an episodic plot presents a succession of events that do not build directly from one to the next. These episodes often

FIGURE I.3 One episode in *Apocalypse Now* shows a helicopter attack accompanied by the music of Wagner.

function as brief subplots, and their ordering is seemingly random. An example of an episodic plot is *Apocalypse Now* (1979), adapted from Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. The beginning and end of this film are clearly connected, but Captain Willard's river journey during the middle of the film contains numerous unrelated episodes. Changing the order of these events would not impact the plot as a whole, which is a clear indication of an episodic story. Narratives involving travel—*Don Quixote*, *Gulliver's Travels*, *Huckleberry Finn*—frequently have an episodic structure.

Both of these basic formulas are subject to numerous variations and nuances. Some stories have multiple plots, each with its own structure. **Flashbacks** interrupt the chronological flow of the story, often bringing new insights to the current situation by showing events from the past. A story that maintains a strict chronological timeline is said to have a **linear plot**, while a plot that incorporates either logical or illogical jumps in time is called a **nonlinear plot**. **Epic** stories tend to have a long string of complications that lead to a number of climaxes while conveying a larger story of a person's life or a major event. Another common variation of the standard structure is the omission of the resolution. A chilling effect can be created by abruptly ending at the climax, leaving the audience in shocked disbelief, as in the final moments of *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967).

FIGURE I.4 *Bonnie and Clyde* ends abruptly after the violent deaths of the two protagonists.

Character

The term "character" is applied in a number of ways in drama. In its most general sense, a character is simply someone in a story. The principal character is called the **protagonist**, and it is primarily through his or her eyes and experiences that we follow a story. Many plots involve a principal adversary, called the **antagonist**, who generates a conflict that sets a series of complications in motion. The interplay between these two key figures often creates the basic tension of the story, as in the classic stories of Sherlock Holmes and his archnemesis Professor Moriarty.

FIGURE 1.5 *Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows* (2011). Holmes has been a protagonist in literature and movies for over 100 years.

FIGURE 1.6 *Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows*. Professor Moriarty, an antagonist, was Holmes's brilliant rival.

For a drama to maintain interest, the characters in a story need to appeal to an audience through their psychological makeup, the conflicts they endure, and the changes they undergo. We admire some characters for being ideal heroes like James Bond, but we are also attracted to other characters that are more like ourselves or people we know. Among the techniques that contribute to characterization in film are the character's actions, physical appearance, and language; the camera technique; and, of course, the music.

Setting

The term **setting**, which refers to both the location and the time frame in which a story takes place, can have an important influence on a narrative. The settings in small towns and suburbia in films such as the *Twilight* series (2008–2012), *Fargo* (1994), and *American Beauty* (1999) contribute to the mood and impact of these diverse stories. In movies such as *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008), *Birdman* (2014), and *Do the Right Thing* (1989), the sights and sounds of city life are essential to the unfolding dramas. By way of contrast, the vastness of outer space and uninhabited planets provide stark contrasts for the heroic efforts to survive in *Interstellar* (2014).

Settings can have a strong psychological effect. The differences between Superman's bright Metropolis and Batman's dark Gotham City contribute greatly to the contrasting moods of these movies. Some stories unfold in restrictive settings that create a sense of being trapped, such as the makeshift boat (with a tiger) in *Life of Pi* (2012) and the prison in *Shawshank Redemption* (1994). The terror in *Jurassic World* (2015) is similarly intensified by its setting: an isolated island with nowhere to run or hide.

FIGURE I.7 The natural beauty of Pandora serves as a background to the cruelty of man in *Avatar*.

In some instances, the setting runs counter to the mood or action of the story. War movies, such as *Platoon* (1986), often give fleeting glimpses of the beauty of nature. Similarly, *The Mission* (1986), *Braveheart* (1995), and *Avatar* (2009) juxtapose stunning landscape panoramas with scenes of horrific violence. In these films, this contrast serves as a reminder of the beauty of the natural world, which stands in direct opposition to the cruelty of man.

The time period for a particular story can also be significant. A movie set in a defined historical era is often referred to as a **period film**, a term that suggests attention to details of costumes, scenery, and manners. Films such as *Amadeus* (1984) and *Shakespeare in Love* (1998) provide us with fascinating glimpses of the past. Plots are sometimes set in historical eras that underwent rapid change, thereby creating a sense of uncertainty and even chaos. Ingmar Bergman's *The Seventh Seal* (1957) is set during the years of disillusionment following the Crusades, and Akira Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai* (1954) takes place during the decline of Japan's feudal system. Similarly, Kirk Douglas portrays one of the West's last cowboys struggling to adjust to modern America in *Lonely Are the Brave* (1962). In all of these stories, the vision of changing traditions has a clear parallel with contemporary American life.

Fantasy films enjoy a wide variety of settings. Some, such as *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), *Avatar* (2009), and *Mad Max Fury Road* (2015), show us the future. By contrast, two of Hollywood's most popular film trilogies are set in the mysterious past. *The Lord of the Rings* takes us to the mythical world of Middle-earth, at a time before the histories of man were recorded. Similarly, *Star Wars*, despite its futuristic images, is set "a long time ago." This simple statement fires the imagination and encourages us to speculate about how these stories connect to our own history.

Theme

A **theme** is the central idea underlying a given story. If the plot gives us the basic actions of a story, then the theme provides us with its intellectual meaning. In *Citizen Kane*, for example, the essential facts of the story are presented in the opening newsreel. But it is the fascinating retelling of the story from five different perspectives that adds details and slowly reveals the principal theme, which is tied to the word "Rosebud."

In this strict literary use of the term, not all films have themes. Some, such as slapstick comedies or light musicals, simply provide entertainment. By contrast, other films may have themes that are too obvious and heavy-handed, and these are often dismissed as propaganda. The racist theme found in *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) mars this otherwise brilliant work of art.

The most highly regarded films tend to deal with serious issues, such as religion, patriotism, and morality. Underneath the hilarious physical comedy of *City Lights* (1931) are the poignant themes of selflessness and the beauty of love. *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1962) teaches us about prejudice with a dual story of racism and fear of someone who is different. Among more recent movies, *WALL-E* (2008), *Avatar*, and *Interstellar* (2014) all have strong messages about the future of our planet without serious environmental controls, although their surface content is radically different. Films such as these impart meaningful messages that can have a profound impact on an audience.

Mood

A movie may be funny, sad, whimsical, profound, optimistic, or dark, or possess any of countless other emotional qualities. This quality is called **mood** or **tone**. The mood of the film can run counter to its story and theme. For example, *Django Unchained* (2012) shows excessive violence and deals with serious issues of revenge and slavery. Yet, the overall mood, often supported with Tarantino's choices of music, is generally lighthearted, and the contrast creates what is called black humor.

Directors have a number of tools they can employ to create specific moods. Among the most powerful are the visual elements and music. The overall mood is often suggested at the onset. When a film begins with a title and credits, music and visual elements can anticipate the general tone for the ensuing narrative. The music accompanying the opening credits of *Gone with the Wind* (1939), *Psycho* (1960), and *The Graduate* (1967) establishes appropriate moods for those films. In *Citizen Kane* (1941), the absence of music during the opening credits helps to create a sense of seriousness, which underlies the entire drama.

ELEMENTS OF FILM

The creation of a film occurs in three stages—preproduction, production, and postproduction. The preproduction phase, largely controlled by the producer, involves the planning and preparation of the film, and may take several years. Once production begins, the film is in the hands of the director, who oversees the activities of