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***Seeing Through Music: Gender and Modernism in Classic Hollywood Film Scores*, Peter Franklin. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011 (208 pages).**
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A Review by K. A. Wisniewski, University of Maryland, Baltimore County (USA)

The study of cinematic scores has always held a marginal role in the study of film. In an age of celebrity culture and special effects, music takes a backseat. In relation to image and narrative, sound, in general, has been devalued and under-appreciated in both scholarly and popular circles. Even in our age of interdisciplinarity, the academy not only questions how to study it but also debates on the discipline to which it belongs: music, film studies, media studies, or history? In particular, Hollywood music, when compared to classical, opera, or late-romantic concert compositions, is often problematically pigeon-holed as being lowbrow. In his book *Seeing Through Music*, Peter Franklin, Professor of Music at Oxford University, rejects these categorisations and criticisms, arguing that film music should be read beside more "serious music" rather than be seen as being beneath it. In reflecting on music from the perspectives of gender and Modernism, he thus reveals a larger history of film and demonstrates the significance of film scores to the last century.

The book is divided into two sections. The first focuses on the relationship between three genres of high-culture musical forms—nineteenth century classical, late-romantic concert, and operatic compositions at the turn of the century—and film scores, specifically tracing the historical debt music in film owes to these "higher" artistic forms. Having debunked past criticism and denigration of film scores, Franklin then proceeds to highlight film scores' contribution and place alongside the aforementioned forms in Part two. In his Introduction, Franklin lays firm groundwork for the study by avoiding abstract theorising and, instead, immediately highlighting some of the recent work conducted on film music, notably Heather Laing's *The Gendered Score* (2007), David Schroeder's *Cinema's Illusions, Opera's Allure* (2002), Andreas Huyssen's *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture and Postmodernism* (1988), and *Beautiful Monsters: Imagining the Classic in Musical Media* (2008) by Michael Long. Although he notes their contributions, Franklin also uses each to highlight the problems of work in the field and to pose questions that will later serve as an impetus for subsequent chapters. Using the 1942 Hollywood film *Now, Voyager* and Bernard Herrmann's opera fragment "Salammbô" in Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane* (1941) as examples, Franklin specifically exposes problems of past works inherent in reading gender through blanket terms like "romantic" and "modern" and heavily relying on the discourse of the "Great Divide," which

simplified and inappropriately defined the distinction between cultured elitist tastes for symphony and opera and the folkways and popular preferences of the masses.

Chapter One begins by more thoroughly explaining the problems in analysing film music without a nuanced music-historical knowledge. The works of Hanns Eisler and Theodor Adorno are focal points. Both contend that high-culture music maintains an aristocratic, intellectual, masculine identity, which takes on "subservient and demeaningly 'feminine'" characteristics when cinematised (and popularised) (25). The author is quick to point out the flaws in this argument and specifically emphasises how this marginalising approach debases film scores and reveals something interesting, not troubling, about "entertainment music". Adorno's fears lie in how culture industries, such as film, devalue true art forms and ultimately produce a mass public unable or unwilling to question social life and political issues. In his concept of "regressive listening", he explains that "entertainment music" is a form of control—"perceived purely as background"—reducing people to silence and leading to the "inability to communicate at all" (qtd. in Franklin 29). Franklin examines a scene from British suburbia in *Brief Encounter* (1945) between husband and wife, Fred and Laura Jesson. Following a long day of built up social and psychological anxieties and physical fatigue from work—not to mention the ending of Laura's extramarital affair—the characters listen in silence to a Rachmaninov concerto. Seemingly, Franklin notes, the characters' silence upholds Adorno's theory. But Franklin queries the difference between what is on the screen and how it is read by audiences. He contends, "there is surely much slippage between the affirmation of the conclusion of *Brief Encounter* and the mindlessly time-filling pleasure that consumers of mass entertainment are supposed to be attracted to" (34). In other words, the highbrow classical piece is mocked here, allowing the character Laura to have "no thoughts at all" of husband and family as she considers her own escape from feminine stereotypes to pursue a moment of happiness with the idea of a briefly idyllic affair. Audiences are aware that much is being said in the silence.

Wagner, Puccini's *Tosca*, and the opera are the subjects of Chapter Two, "Exploitation and Seduction". Here, Franklin argues that the techniques of classical Hollywood cinema were borrowed from and actually rely on European operatic culture and traditions. The author returns to the problems of the Great Divide and positions operas, such as *Tosca*, as similar to a prototypical mass-entertainment movie. Firstly, Puccini's operatic music functions like a cinematic camera, "positioning women as objects of the dominating male gaze" (44). Secondly, examining composers like Franz Schreker and Erich Wolfgang Korngold and a host of European dramatists and operatic composers, Franklin reveals that high culture "was being administered no less carefully than mass entertainment would be perceived to be by its polemical detractors" (51). Franklin concludes these points by demonstrating how the popular, modern opera is ultimately reworked and replaced as the four- or five-reel feature film, using *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Max Reinhardt, 1935) as an example. While fans of Korngold may be a bit disappointed by the limited analysis and attention his work receives here (the author returns to him later in the book), the chapter will be of interest to Shakespearean scholars and those interested in filmic adaptations of the bard's work. Taking a brief but poignant look into the composer's rearrangement and elaborate reworkings of Mendelssohn extracts (intermingled with original material by Korngold himself), Franklin spends some time on the complexity of the piece related to the sequence showcasing Bottom's Dream. Those who revisit the sequence will

doubtlessly agree with the author's observation that this piece captures and catapults all the complexities and dimensions of Bottom and the play at large, just as well as *Tosca* might.

The book's engagement with gender issues gathers pace in "Into the Mists . . . Subjective Realms (and the Undoing of Men?)". Again, the discussion begins by repositioning Hollywood music alongside European high culture and early twentieth-century modernism. Tight budgets and deadlines allowed compositions to escape both official control of studio bosses and authorial consideration to be given to the public's tastes in music; thus, this process of "snap decisions" and "a kind of automatic writing", for Franklin, allowed composers to write pieces with dimension, pieces that were layered with meaning and truth. Therefore, many works from the period constructed "models of subjectivity that were as revealing and yet coercive, as vulnerable and yet mysteriously threatening" as some of the female stars they were complimenting (64). Film scores in *King Kong* (Ernest B. Schoedsack and Merian C. Cooper, 1933), *The Bride of Frankenstein* (James Whale, 1935), and *Rebecca* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1940) achieve something new, something greater than truly autonomous, high-culture music: their self-indulgent performances are simultaneously attached to their own deconstruction. Max Steiner's work on *King Kong* seemingly warns of the threatening Other—Nature—in the distance and the super-masculinity symbolised by the monstrous Kong. But when audiences listen closely, they realise that it is actually Ann's music (the female lead played by Fay Wray) playing into Kong's descending three-note motif. The masculine motif breaks down and is feminised, as audiences grow sympathetic to the beast. Similar to a nineteenth-century operatic orgy scene, this progressively feminised theme acts as the femme fatale, a dangerous interloper who is initially allied to men and ultimately responsible for their demise. All three films listed above serve as good examples of how music functions as a crucial character (and narrator, at times) capable of shifting to a feminine subjectivity. This chapter will be of particular interest to those interested in the horror or noir genres.

The second half of the book parallels Part One, expanding its focus to include a wider variety of film types, but maintaining its division of musical periods (symphony, late nineteenth-century, and modernist). Chapter Four continues to examine how Hollywood film scores from the 1930s and 1940s owe a debt to past symphonies and how they may be even more powerful because they are somewhat detached from these high-culture restraints. Possibly, the most interesting to the reader will be Franklin's evaluation of *Gone with the Wind* (1936). Unfortunately, the section spends too much time readdressing problems with Adorno's model and the argument flounders. The "Tara" theme remains "as difficult to assess in any conclusive way as is Scarlett O'Hara herself" (107). Nevertheless, the reader's sense that film scores are unjustly marginalised is reinforced.

The subsequent chapter departs from the approach of previous chapters. Instead of focusing on the feminisation of film music and the feminine themes that construct and deconstruct the respective films' leading ladies, Franklin examines what he refers to as "*extramusical* women", whose action, singing, or narrating voice is detached from the music, yet they still reflect the sentimentality attached to the tune and are undone by it. Two classic films represent this idea: *Casablanca* (Michael Curtiz, 1943) and *Deception* (Irving Rapper, 1946). The iconic *As Time Goes By* is, of course, a popular, almost humorously sentimental, tune for the

average viewer, but the embedded meaning it has for Rick (and the audience) is as overwhelming as any symphony. Moreover, the song's purity has the "powerful ability to achieve a politicized social cohesion" and instigate action that threatens both the ideals of patriarchal culture but also nationalistic and political ideologies (120). The treatment of *Deception* places Christine (Bette Davis) and Hollenius (Claude Rains) into the roles of Ilsa and Rick; playing Beethoven's *Appassionata* makes Christine a threat to patriarchal authority, i.e. Hollenius. Despite a more thorough reading of the selective films in this section, some of the more rewarding details here are the surrounding historical context and biographical details of *Deception* composer Korngold.

The book concludes by examining the problematic figure of modernism. Among the films discussed here are two more Hitchcock films: *Spellbound* (1945) and *Psycho* (1960). Previous chapters reveal an alternative prehistory to "entertainment music" ultimately levelling the playing field between film music and more "high-cultured" tastes, but this chapter shows Hollywood scores confronting this culture and specifically critiquing the ideals of modernism. *Spellbound* begins with the "conventional notion that Hollywood women . . . dream Hollywood romance", but, as the film concludes, the film "tells us that Hollywood *men* dream modernism" (144). This is fully realised with the unromantic and truly eerie score of *Psycho*. Reminiscent of Bartók, Stravinsky and Aaron Copland, the mutes and screeches of strings and mechanical sounding rhythms reflect upon the hustle and bustle of modern life and, suggesting Marion's subjectivity, a disillusionment with it. The description of the music heard creeping around the Bates Motel and the repeated chords when Norman is at the peephole recall Laura Mulvey's classic essay on the film and the male cinematic gaze, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema". Interestingly, Franklin spends little time on the iconic shower scene and instead opts to focus on the closing scene of the film when the music envelopes the audience as Norman's image is superimposed with that of his mother. For the author, such scores are undeniably linked to, and critically target, the very high modernism that rejects such film music.

While the book may be a little disappointing for film students expecting a more critical analysis of their favourite cinematic scenes, Franklin's text is invaluable for presenting a new perspective on the heavily examined topic of classic Hollywood films. One could argue that some sections become repetitive, that too much time is spent on the problems of past scholarship and not enough dedicated to the film scores that will ultimately validate his claims, but perhaps this is necessary to challenge the work that has come before him. Franklin's strength is the scope of the book. He envisions a history of twentieth-century music that not only includes film music, but champions it. *Seeing Through Music* attempts to rewrite this history; hopefully the groundwork it lays down will aid future scholars to fill the gaps extant in relation to the study and significance of film music.

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K.A. Wisniewski is the editor of *The Comedy of Dave Chappelle: Critical Essays*. His work has appeared in a variety of journals and collections, most recently in *The Chariton Review*, *Raintaxi: Review of Books*, *The Maryland Historical Magazine*, *The Chiron Review*, *Bluestem Magazine*, and *The Stewart/Colbert Effect: Essays on the Real Impacts of Fake News*. Currently, he is a doctoral candidate in Literacy, Language, and Culture at University of Maryland, Baltimore County and teaches Public History at Stevenson University, USA.