Introduction

The study of the intersection of opera and film is relatively new. It began two decades ago with Jeremy Tambling's influential volume *Opera, Ideology and Film* (1987), which stresses opera's political role when it appears in filmic form.[1] Musicology turned to opera and film a bit later, and the area has flourished amid the field's embrace of interdisciplinary topics and music for film. Three books have laid a foundation and formed a critical first stage. *Opera on Screen*, my study from 2000, offers a preliminary framework for interpreting full-length screen versions of opera.[2] In an exploration of key repertoire, it addresses medial differences among cinema, television, and video and suggests ways of thinking about the relationship between live and filmed opera. Two years later a vibrant collection extends the conversation. *Between Opera and Cinema*, edited by Jeongwon Joe and Rose Theresa, juxtaposes diverse approaches to a wide swath of repertoire.[3] In addition to studies of full-length opera treatments, many essays discuss opera's role in mainstream films or non-Western traditions. The third book is Michal Grover-Friedlander's *Vocal Apparitions: The Attraction of Cinema to Opera* (2005).[4] Through readings of selected films, this innovative study explores the spectral implications of the voice in operatic encounters with visual and aural media. Meanwhile, major articles have appeared in journals and edited volumes.[5]

I see the present study as part of a second generation of scholarship, joining recent publications such as the collection *Wagner and Cinema*.[6] Building on earlier work, *When Opera Meets Film* argues that opera can reveal something fundamental about a film, and film can do the same for an opera. In exploring this symbiotic relationship, the book refines and expands our approaches to opera and film, adds important repertoire to the scholarly purview, and advances our understanding of the aesthetics of the opera/film encounter. By aesthetics I mean

the sort of broad, inclusive concept that Jerrold Levinson lays out in the introduction to *The Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics*, and not some narrow focus on properties of beauty.[7] In my study aesthetics takes in the fullness of the workings of the hybrid encounter, on the large level and the small, as well as the experiencing of the interaction, or what Levinson calls aesthetic experience. While this suggests a rather open-ended inquiry, the book thematizes a core of issues that unify the chapters and structure the whole.

STRUCTURE AND REPERTOIRE

When Opera Meets Film consists of case-studies of selected works. Most are mainstream films that involve opera and a few are full-length treatments of operas, or what are termed opera-films.[8] Through analysis of key repertoire, the book takes us further into the fertile regions of the opera/film encounter and offers new ways of interpreting the combination. Certain criteria underlie the choice of films. One involves an emphasis on important works – films of recognized quality or influence that hold a distinctive place in film studies or opera/film studies. Another applies specifically to mainstream films, the bulk of the repertoire. In these movies, opera does not serve a merely decorative or incidental role but provides access to the very meaning of the film. This essentialness of opera in certain films forms the *raison d'être* of the book. In Chapter 1, for example, a key argument in the exploration of the *Godfather* trilogy (1972–1990) holds that the operatic visual style is absolutely essential to the special aesthetic tone for which the set is praised. Or take the critical contribution of Mozart's trio "Soave sia il vento" from *Così fan tutte* to the rarefied depiction of desire in *Sunday, Bloody Sunday* (1971) and its arrogant display in *Closer* (2004), both explored in Chapter 6. In other words, in the featured works the taut interdependence of opera and film plays a vital role in shaping the basic character of the film, and without opera the film would become quite a different work and arguably be less successful. Chapter 3's study of opera-films presents a different situation because opera serves as the obvious starting point for an opera-film.

But it demonstrates the other part of the book's argument – that film has something fundamental to contribute to our understanding of an opera. This is also borne out in the other chapters.

The main lens into interpretation comes by way of the headings that structure the book: Style (Part I), Subjectivity (Part II), and Desire (Part III). The three categories engage narrative, representation, and meaning, and furnish ways of identifying what is important in a film. "Style" opens a window on large-scale aesthetic issues as it emphasizes relationships between the workings of opera and film as genres. It also affords insight into the wide range of films in which opera can make a difference. "Subjectivity" places the center of gravity on identity and the individual, both inside and outside the fiction, and homes in on human and cultural elements that guide the director's approach. "Desire" deals with the fascinating interplay between expectations on the part of characters and viewers and the affirmation or denial of those expectations inside or outside the fiction. Subjectivity and desire open up important lines of inquiry because they target the sorts of dynamic processes that are central to the workings and the understanding of the hybrid encounter that is opera and film.

Each section consists of two chapters and begins with a study that is grand in scale and approach. Acting as a kind of anchor, these initial chapters tend to be longer than their partners, apply a broader brushstroke to the material, and involve landmark repertoire. They provide a larger context for the shared focus and lay a foundation for the more targeted study to follow.

"Style" opens with a spacious study of the ways in which operatic style crafts an iconic set of American films, Francis Ford Coppola's *Godfather* trilogy. It also explores the implications of a climactic visit to an opera house that forms the backdrop to a blowout montage of music and murder. The grandeur of the epic in Chapter 1 is followed by a very different sort of aesthetic: the brevity of the fragment. In Chapter 2 we explore its role in the 1987 film *Aria*, in which short segments from ten operas receive MTV-like visualizations from ten different directors.

"Subjectivity" begins with an examination of the strong subjective viewpoint in the opera-films of international opera director Jean-Pierre

Ponnelle. Like Coppola, Ponnelle shapes operatic qualities through his control of image, but he applies strong subjective techniques by way of certain narrative devices. The next chapter deals with Claude Chabrol's masterpiece *La Cérémonie* (1995) and his complex subjective stance in connection with *Don Giovanni*. It occurs by way of an opera telecast at the movie's climax that accompanies gruesome murders in the filmic plot. Subjectivity operates in tandem with class as Chabrol takes aim at elitist meanings of art and the bourgeois degradations of watching television.

"Desire," the theme of Part III, is launched with a broad inquiry into another iconic American film, *Moonstruck* (1987). Desire permeates the layers of the movie and forges striking connections with opera and operatic qualities. While most of the discussions involve desires inside the fiction, desire spills over to viewers and their identification with the narrative and their relationship to kitsch. Chapter 6 explores filmic desires in connection with the musical desires of "Soave sia il vento" in two interesting films: the British movie *Sunday, Bloody Sunday* and the recent American film *Closer*. Through individual and comparative analysis, we see how Mozart's music contains the seeds of ironic desire that play out in fascinating ways in the films.

The volume concludes with an Epilogue on operaticness. This important but elusive quality circulates through the chapters, sometimes as a featured topic and more often as something left unsaid. My hope is that the brief remarks will help to pull the study together and leave readers with something specific to think about when they next encounter opera and film.

As seen in the overview of the interpretive core, the book covers a wide range of filmic repertoire and operatic disposition. Four of the six chapters focus on opera in mainstream film, while one treats full-length opera-film and another explores postmodernist pastiche that falls outside generic boundaries. The films span some thirty-three years, from 1971 to 2004, and cover several national traditions. Many prominent directors are represented – Coppola and Mike Nichols from America, John Schlesinger and Ken Russell from Britain, Chabrol from France, and Ponnelle from the international opera stage. The

relationship of the operatic part to the filmic whole also showcases variety. Chapters 1 and 3, for instance, each examine multiple films by one director that share similar operatic behavior. Chapter 6, in contrast, starts with one piece of music and shows how it functions in two films. Or take the chapter on *Aria* (Chapter 2), where adjacent fragments by different directors on different operatic pieces receive attention. Chapter 4 contributes to our understanding of medium as it investigates television's role as the conveyor of opera within a film – a rare, possibly unique instance of this sort of encounter. And the broad-based study of *Moonstruck* in Chapter 5 reveals a rich trove of opera and operaticness that is seldom found in any one movie.

MUSIC

Music plays a major role in *When Opera Meets Film* and emerges as a key theme across the chapters. It takes shape in a variety of concerns. One involves film-music functions and their application to opera and film. Film-music scholarship has developed standard categories that are defined in terms of their relationship to the story, or diegesis: diegetic music (music that is inside the story) and nondiegetic music (music that is outside the story). Claudia Gorbman helpfully added the term metadiegetic twenty years ago to account for situations beyond the standard binary.[9] Ever since, scholars have noted the need for fine-tuning so that the categories better reflect the workings of narrative, agency, and spectatorship.[10] I also feel this need, and a major aim of the case-studies is to tease out the subtleties of how the operatic music functions in the film. While diegetic and nondiegetic functions still constitute the base in the book, many places change function and display special relationships with the story or the source opera. In other words, seldom is diegetic or nondiegetic status straightforward. The study breaks ground through the application of terminology that further refines the categories of diegesis. I frequently use the concept of psychodiegetic music, a term proffered in an unpublished paper by Alexis Witt,[11] to indicate a psychological function for the music. Many discussions distinguish between this function and

Gorbman's metadiegetic status, a larger term that enfolds all sorts of extradiegetic situations.

Beyond these details, the treatment of operatic music in terms of film-music categories presents a special set of circumstances: a pre-existing type of music that has its own accumulated meaning, and (typically) a vocal idiom that includes a text.[12] These factors play a role in determining which types of film-music functioning are applicable. Occasionally some model beyond diegesis fits the situation, as in the interpretation of Roddam's "Liebestod" segment in *Aria*, discussed in Chapter 2. I coin the term interactive soundtrack to describe how the music functions in this self-consciously operatic venture. For other films, however, the retention of standard categories and expanding on them as needed makes better sense. It places films that use opera within the purview of cinema and promotes study alongside conventional film music.

The book also pays a great deal of attention to the operatic music, particularly in the context of its source opera. This can range from large issues such as the opera's reputation and reception, to small details of musical style. For example, the bigger musical picture informs the exploration of *Aria* (Chapter 2), where the genesis and afterlife of *Turandot* are linked to Russell's methods of visualizing "Nessun dorma." In Chapter 5 the reputation of *La Bohème* as a kitsch work prompts observations on what *Moonstruck* accomplishes for the opera. On the smaller level, many chapters feature close readings of the music. Chapter 6, for example, examines salient elements of harmony, texture, and orchestration in "Soave sia il vento" and the significance of these features for image and filmic plot. Chapter 4, with the *Don Giovanni* sequence in *La Cérémonie*, also deals with a limited operatic component and provides a detailed analysis of the music's relationship with story and image. Larger interpretive categories, particularly class and power, inform the discussion of the numbers Chabrol chooses for his subjective critique. Although the study of Ponnelle's work (Chapter 3) engages music more generally, in key numbers I demonstrate how certain elements relate to the director's subjective methods. Indeed, the discussions thematize the idea that

Ponnelle's visual techniques "choreograph the score" in their close relationship with musical behavior.

A special musical perspective figures in the study of the *Godfather* set. In addition to a music-image analysis of *Cavalleria rusticana* in the montage at the end, the chapter discusses Nino Rota's scored music for the films. While it is not literal opera, its operatic quality works alongside filmic elements to create the trilogy's operatic tone, especially in the first two installments. Elsewhere in the book, especially Chapters 4 and 5, I mention other soundtrack music and occasionally tie it to the actual opera music. But only in Chapter 1 does it rise to prominence.

INTERMEDIALITY

Devising suitable ways to categorize the relationship between the two media presents a challenge to anyone working in opera and film. A certain amount of anecdotal description supplies needed information, and like most work in the area this study makes use of the practice. But one would like to have a framework that can lead to larger observations and encourage comparative discussion. In fact, such a system already exists: the theory of intermediality. To date it has not made major inroads into musicological work on opera and film,[13] but it holds a prominent place in a study on the topic by a scholar of Italian studies, Bernhard Kuhn. In *Die Oper im italienischen Film* (2005), Kuhn provides a detailed survey of theories of intermediality and applies them to selected films.[14] Among the theoretical works he discusses is Werner Wolf's *The Musicalization of Fiction: A Study in the Theory and History of Intermediality*.[15] Wolf's semiotic study offers a simple and elegant system to categorize the relative importance of media when they combine – of all media, not merely the two in the title. *When Opera Meets Film* adopts Wolf's enormously useful framework. Intermediality becomes a major theme of the book and promotes conversation across diverse repertoire that makes up the study.

Wolf's system features two categories that capture the relative importance of the components in the medial combination. An

encounter qualifies as overt intermediality if "both media are directly present with their typical or conventional signifiers and if consequently each medium remains distinct and is in principle 'quotable' separately" (40). The other category is covert intermediality: "the participation of (at least) two conventionally distinct media in the signification of an artifact in which, however, only **one** of the media appears directly with its typical or conventional signifers and hence may be called the dominant medium, while another one (the non-dominant medium) is indirectly present 'within' the first medium" (41, boldface in the original). Wolf goes on to discuss factors in actual situations that affect how hybrid situations are analyzed. These include, among others, the intensity of the intermedial relation and the fact that one or more of the media may themselves be hybrid – the situation for both opera and film. I take these elements and more into account, and the beauty of Wolf's system is that its simplicity leaves room for all the pertinent factors that characterize a given situation. Its openness and flexibility make it extremely valuable for my purposes.[16]

The discussions of intermediality in *When Opera Meets Film* yield fascinating insights. In the first two *Godfather* films, for example, the operatic tone that is crafted by image, pacing, and ritual creates covert intermediality, for opera's signifers are subordinate and they join the medial realm of film. With the diegetic performance of *Cavalleria rusticana* the situation changes. The first part of the sequence constitutes overt intermediality, but in the second half the status is ambiguous as the camera cuts away often. Does overt status continue when opera is not literally seen? The answer depends on the viewer and the extent to which opera stays in memory or is attended to with only some of its signifiers present. This also describes the situation in Chabrol's staging of *Don Giovanni* in *La Cérémonie* (Chapter 4), where the televised opera is often heard but not actually seen. In a similar way, fluctuations in volume of the "Soave" cues (Chapter 6) complicate the determination of intermedial status because opera's presence varies with the sound level.

Another suggestive intermedial encounter appears in the *Godfather* films. At the very end an instrumental piece from the opera, the

Intermezzo, intones on the soundtrack. Only the operatic-savvy viewer will recognize the source and experience the encounter as overt intermediality. For everyone else, which means the overwhelming majority of viewers, the scene represents covert intermediality because the music resembles a film score and seems to be part of film. In Chapter 2 a similar situation unfolds in the instrumental music that precedes the aria "Nessun dorma." Here, however, the explicit operatic purpose of *Aria* may keep opera's signifiers dominant. As these examples show, the experiencing of the opera/film encounter as well as a viewer's knowledge and predilections have a tremendous impact on how the intermedial relationship is characterized.

A particularly intriguing intermedial situation arises with respect to opera-film. One would assume that the genre represents a clear-cut intermedial situation – that it is overt status because opera and film are each foregrounded as its components. Yet in Chapter 3 we see how a particular device of Ponnelle's challenges the certainty of overt status. A key subjective technique involves "interior singing," an arrangement whereby vocal music is heard but no moving lips are seen. The heard music becomes less tethered to the operatic realm and the music can imply something else as its source, such as a film score or even a literary genre. In my view opera is not weakened in these situations, but strengthened as we see its ability to capitalize on film's potential. The Chabrol chapter also advances the understanding of intermediality and genre. Televised opera, not just opera, interacts with film, a situation that shows how a hybrid medium, in this case opera, can become even more hybrid, as it were, in certain circumstances. While we must be careful to distinguish between medial qualities and means of presentation – the phonograph, for instance, usually functions as a means of presentation and not as a medium (see Chapters 5 and 6) – in the Chabrol the significance of the telecast renders television a medium that must be considered in the medial landscape.

A further spin on the illuminating powers of intermediality occurs in connection with *Moonstruck*. One of the important cues involves the lead couple hearing an important part of *La Bohème* on a phonograph.

While the situation constitutes overt intermediality, the music counts as psychodiegetic for Ronny the operaphile – this is music he knows well – while merely diegetic for the operatically ignorant Loretta. This place shows how intermediality can combine with film-music functions to analyze the dramatic implications of an operatic encounter, and how intermedial status can mean different things to different characters who engage with the music.

OTHER THEMES

In addition to the larger structure of the volume and the unifying themes of the whole, some ideas circulate more modestly, appearing in only a few chapters. One group involves medium and technology. Opera on television assumes a prominent role in Chapters 3 and 4. In the study of Ponnelle, we discuss how his opera-films for television fit the intimacy of the domestic medium and the small screen. Arguably his subjective methods would not work as comfortably on the large screen, although the director might take exception to the distinction. In the following chapter, telecast opera forms the focus in the filmic story of *La Cérémonie*, and the cultural implications of the relay production become a major concern of the director.

With respect to medium, I would like to clarify a basic term in the book. The field of film studies deploys the word "film" in a variety of ways. While it sometimes denotes cinema only, the term is usually more inclusive and takes in works that are produced on film stock, videotape, or digital equipment and can be presented in various venues, such as television. The present study adopts this inclusive definition. Thus the "film" of the book's title accommodates Ponnelle's treatments of opera for television. They appear in *When Opera Meets Film* because they function as real films, round out the range of the repertoire, and contribute something important to the aesthetic aims of the project.

To return to recurring ideas, the phonograph receives considerable attention in Chapters 5 and 6. In *Moonstruck* and *Sunday, Bloody Sunday*, the device assumes a ritualistic function as it launches opera in