

Introduction

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One of the authors represented in this collection of essays notes in passing that the concept of a ‘companion’ volume might these days be in danger of being considered a little old fashioned, as indeed the idea of ‘film’ is itself somewhat passé in the exciting and technologically unpredictable age of digital audio-visual media in which we live. Yet film music and the music of other related screen media, and the increasingly prolific field of film-music studies, are nowadays so diverse in their aims and achievements – and potentially bewildering in their rich variety – that even seasoned aficionados (including the present editors) sometimes feel the need for a little companionable guidance through the veritable labyrinth of possibilities offered by the intelligent and resourceful combinations of sound and image by which we are constantly surrounded. In assembling this book, it has been fascinating for us to see how all our contributors have helped continue to shape our necessarily flexible perceptions of how film music is made, how it might be considered to function and how it is appreciated.

In planning this book, one of our priorities was to concentrate on the practicalities of film-music production as much as on the theorizing and analysis which the composition of such music has long since generated in both academia and the media. Included here, therefore, are a leading contemporary film composer’s reflections on his career and the state of the industry from a personal perspective (Chapter 5), some thumbnail discussions of how other living composers view both their cinematic art and scholars’ varying attempts to come to terms with it (Chapter 7), as well as detailed accounts of the development of film-sound technology and the various ways in which soundtracks have been assembled across the decades (Chapters 1 and 2). The manner in which one celebrated film composer of Hollywood’s Golden Age conducted his music in recording sessions is subjected to fascinatingly close scrutiny (Chapter 3), debunking in the process the tired myth that a creative genius in the film industry can simply stand up in front of a hard-pressed orchestra and risk blowing a huge budget by waving his arms around and hoping it will all come right in the end. Composers, orchestrators, arrangers, performers, conductors, music directors and music editors are a constant presence throughout these essays as a reminder that the often sophisticated film scoring which continues to generate reams of discussion is for the most part the intense

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product of exceptionally hard graft – a fundamentally collaborative process, often carried out to punishingly tight and in some cases even health-threatening deadlines – all accomplished at the very heart of a high-pressure commercial industry.

As well as examining how film music is actually made, our anthology considers the various ways in which it might be interpreted and analysed. Analytical processes not only cover its many and varied dramatic functions, which began life in the three broad categories of ‘synchronization, subjugation and continuity’, as our historical account of the transition from silent cinema to the sound film demonstrates (Chapter 1), but also embrace considerations of wildly differing musical styles, compositional techniques and cultural contexts. One of the delights of studying the extraordinary panoply of film-scoring possibilities is the way in which we need to switch from (for example) an appreciation of the genealogy of cowboy-associated folk tunes (Chapter 14) to the complexities of esoteric twelve-note serial manipulations (Chapter 19), or from well-worn classical styles to dynamic rock music – sometimes even within the same film (Chapter 17) – or from contrasting subgenres of jazz (Chapters 11 and 12), both symphonic and authentic, to the dauntingly large soundworld of pop. Once regarded as a rather dubious type of film scoring by die-hard traditionalists for whom the only viable music track was a finely crafted and leitmotif-based orchestral score, pop scoring and hit songs in all sorts of styles have been truly ubiquitous in movies across the decades, starting in the silent era, blossoming in early sound musicals and the swing era, coming prominently to the fore in the age of rock’n’roll and culminating in the many exciting developments in modern pop-scoring methods from the 1960s to the present day. The present essays vividly demonstrate the sheer variety of ways and genres in which such music has been handled: these include one of the best-loved instances of a hit song in a melodrama of the early 1940s (Chapter 8), the life and times of the British pop-music film (Chapter 4) and telling examples of the exploitation of pop music in CGI animation (Chapter 9), horror and science fiction (Chapter 13).

The theoretical side of film-music scholarship is a particularly daunting area of the subject, covering as it does general considerations of music’s contribution to film narrative and of the often complex and sometimes intractable relationships between music, sound and dialogue. The summary of film-music theories provided here (Chapter 6) offers a comprehensive account of attitudes both classic and right up-to-date – as well as a vivid illustration of the formidable extent to which film musicology has burgeoned since the first wave of scholars disseminated their groundbreaking (and still widely cited) work in print in the 1980s and 1990s. While some theorizing about movie soundtracks, both old and new, might be felt to be somewhat

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divorced from reality, many modern scholars have also continued the more traditional, positivistic pursuits of delving meticulously into archives to study and analyse primary source materials, and the interviewing of composers in order to establish exactly how their film scores are created (Chapter 7). Contemporary film scholarship has also been distinguished – though it was certainly a long time coming – by the increasing attention paid in English-language publications to national film industries other than that of the United States, and to a wide range of non-Anglophone films. While Hollywood output is inevitably well represented in our collection, we also include studies of films from the United Kingdom (Chapters 4 and 16), Italy (Chapter 17), France (Chapter 18), Germany (Chapter 19), Japan (Chapter 20) and India (Chapter 21). Treatments of genres particularly associated with Hollywood, such as the musical (Chapter 15), the western (Chapter 14), film noir (Chapter 11), horror and science fiction (Chapter 13), as well as the silent film (Chapter 1) and Golden Era classics (Chapters 3 and 8), are offset by illuminating considerations of the Italian revisionist western (Chapter 17) and the ways in which other genres, notably the musical and animation, have developed in the UK (Chapters 4 and 16) and the Tamil film industry (Chapter 21), in many respects rather differently from their US counterparts. At many moments we are also reminded that some of the most significant innovations in film sound have occurred in the often experimental context of independent ‘art’ cinema (see, for example, Chapters 16 and 18), which studiously avoids the standardized practices attendant upon the fundamentally commercial considerations which have dominated mainstream film production for more than a century.

If we have in recent years come a little closer to understanding how film music is made, how it functions and how it is interpreted, there is one further area of fascination which has only recently begun to be properly considered: what can film music actually *feel* like? The sometimes peculiarly visceral effect of film scoring, especially that couched in disconcerting modernist idioms and forms of *musique concrète*, is tantalisingly explored in a number of contributions (Chapters 10, 13 and 18) and serves as a timely reminder that there are still crucial aspects of our subject which are as yet little understood and likely to be the focus of much future research.