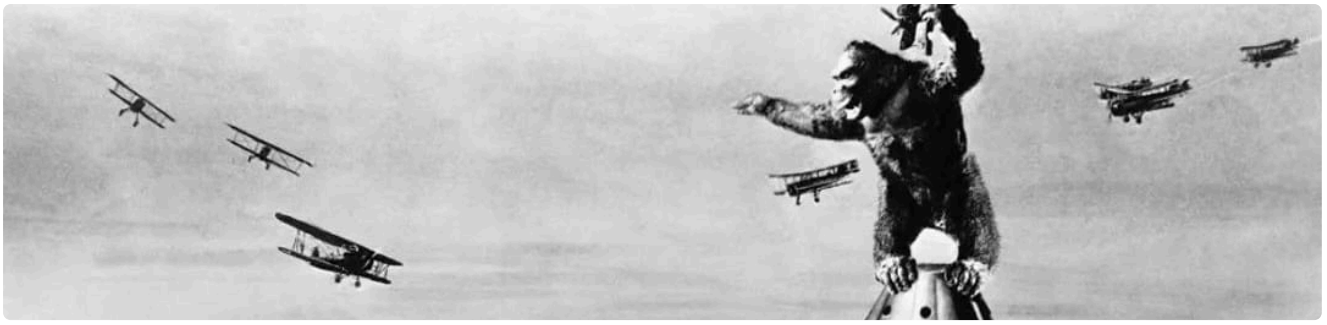
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From Europe to Hollywood, and Back. The Classic Hollywood Film Score

Chloé Huvet

How did migrations of composers from Central and Eastern Europe to the United States shape the sound of Hollywood cinema? This article analyzes the transfer of musical repertoires and practices that gave birth to the Classic Hollywood Film Score in the 1930s and the feedback effects in Europe.

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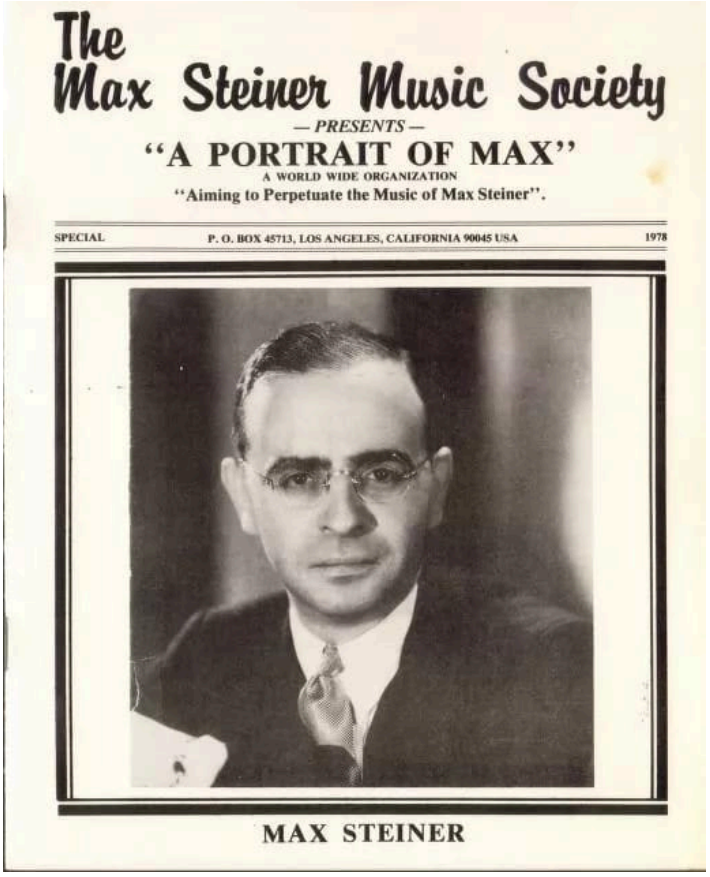
From the 1930s to the 1950s, inspired by Eastern and Central European composers recently emigrated to the United States, a new cinematographic aesthetic was created—The Classic Hollywood Film Score—whose golden age coincides with that of the American Classical Studio Era (1930-1940). The principal agents are Austrian (Max Steiner, 1888-1971; Erich Wolfgang Korngold, 1897-1957), German (Franz Waxman, 1908-1967), Hungarian (Miklós Rózsa, 1907-1995) and Ukrainian (Dimitri Tiomkin, 1894-1979). Alfred Newman (1901-1970) and Victor Young (1900-1956) are the only important figures of this movement born in the United States. Young's musical education, however, took place in Poland at the Imperial Conservatory of Warsaw under the direction of Roman Statkowksi, then with Isidor Philipp at the Conservatory of Paris, before his return to Chicago in 1920. While each composer was contracted to a particular studio and each had his own style of composition, they share some traits which taken together form a unified approach to movie music composition. The approach for scores in classical cinema is already well-known and described by scholars; our object is not to bring new knowledge to this discussion. We'll simply recall here the main principles: 1) The musical source is not visible (except for diegetic music [1]) and its performers must stay invisible to the spectator. 2) Conceived as an accompaniment to the action and dialogues, the music must not attract a conscious attention; its entrances and exits are discreet. The dialogue, which occupies the highest place in the sound track's hierarchy, must not be drowned out by the score. 3) Music signifies and helps to intensify emotion. 4) The score punctuates narration by signaling its different steps, specifying the geographical frame, taking the adopted point of view, and using various techniques to illustrate actions. 5) Music is a component of continuity, smoothing the sometimes abrupt changes caused by editing and offsetting the choppy quality of the soundtrack. 6) Music ensures the unity of the production through an often dense thematic network, whose principal themes are repeated and transformed as the film progresses.

More broadly, this shared aesthetic is part of an operatic understanding of movie scores in the tradition of program music (operas, ballets, melodramas, symphonic poems, etc.) from the late 19th to early 20th century. The aim of this article is to establish how the cultural movement of European composers toward the United States created the Hollywood sound of the 1930s and 1940s. This will involve seeing concretely how transfers of repertoires and practices are transposed. What do these emigrant composers retain in the framework of classic American cinema? In what ways was the post-romantic idiom transformed and adapted to the Hollywood cinematographic medium, and how was Classic Hollywood scoring in turn received in Europe?

Transatlantic Migrations and the Emergence of The Classic Hollywood Film Score

Political factors weigh heavily in transatlantic interchanges from 1910 to 1930. The First World War, the rise in anti-Semitism, Nazism and totalitarian regimes forced many Eastern European composers to emigrate to the United States, where, under contract to major California studios, they shaped Classical Hollywood scoring as a new musical standard. The exile of Steiner, Korngold, Waxman, Rózsa and Tiomkin is part of a broader general wave of migration to the United States among musical personalities like Arnold Schönberg, Hanns Eisler, Alexandre Tansman and Igor Stravinksy. For these artists, permanent emigration to the United States takes place on a path already well-worn by itinerant European populations. The ideological quality of these emigrations forges quite different feelings of attachment vis-à-vis a lost Europe. Notable examples include Schönberg's conservatism and loyalty to the double monarchy, and Stravinsky's claim of estrangement regarding czarist Russia and the disintegration of his emotional attachment to his native land starting in the 1920s. (Stravinsky became an American Citizen in

1945, after having been naturalized French in 1934.) These elements are also fundamental in the journey of many German, Austrian and Hungarian film makers who, like Ernst Lubitsch, Michael Curtiz, Erich von Strohein, Fritz Lang or Billy Wilder, put down roots in Hollywood, where they exert a considerable influence on cinematographic production. Many of them also ended up working with the masters of the Classic Hollywood Film Score, whose founding figure was Max Steiner.



Max Steiner on the cover of a special edition of the Max Steiner Music Society, 1978

Max Steiner was born on May 10, 1888, to a Jewish family renowned in the worlds of both music and the performing arts; his godfather is Richard Strauss. His grandfather, Maximilian Steiner, directed the *Theater an de Wien*—a monument of Viennese artistic life—from 1869 to 1880, where he made important contributions to the promotion of the Operetta as a genre. Maximilian's father Gabor was one of the period's most important producers of operettas and plays. Max Steiner showed his taste for music very early on. After learning piano, he received a full musical education at the Vienna Imperial Academy of Music until he was 13 years old. Among his professors were Robert Fuchs, Hermann Graedener, Felix Weingartner and Gustave Mahler. Owing to the renown of his father, he directed an orchestra for the first time at the age of 12 for an American operetta by Gustav Kerker, entitled *The Belle of New York*. He also composed, starting in his teens, several operettas: *The Beautiful Greek Girl* (1903), *The Crystal Cup* (1906) and *The Merry Widower* (1907 on a libretto by Julius Freund, a pastiche of Franz Lehar's famous operetta *The Merry Widow*).

Steiner next gained solid experience in Great Britain, where he wrote and directed several ballets and eclectic theatre shows. When the First World War broke out while he was working in London, he was considered a foreign enemy and ordered to turn himself in to an internment camp. Thanks to the intervention of his friend, the Duke of Westminster, he obtained papers to leave England and went alone

to the United States aboard the liner *Lapland* from Liverpool, arriving in New York on November 7, 1914. After temporary work as a copyist and rehearsal pianist, he began his career on Broadway directing orchestras and producing orchestrations and arrangements for operettas, musicals and shows by Rudolf Friml, Victor Herbert, Jerome Kern and George Gershwin, assimilating little by little their method of combining orchestral sounds and handling the placement of instrumentalists, thus acquiring a strong reputation in the world of stage shows.

In 1929, he left New York for Hollywood where William LeBaron, the head of RKO pictures, hired him for the film *Rio Rita*, the movie adaptation of a musical comedy that Steiner had orchestrated and directed on Broadway in 1927. Steiner was subsequently hired by RKO as an orchestrator. David O. Selznick, who took over as head of production for RKO in 1931, entrusted Steiner with the entire score for *Symphony of Six Million*, which makes a strong impression by its almost continuous symphonic accompaniment. Supported by the producer, Steiner composed the music for *The Most Dangerous Game* (1932) and then *King Kong* (1933), which are turning points both in his career and in the history of film music. The vast symphonic fresco of *King Kong* is the baptism of Classic Hollywood Scoring, which Steiner brings to a culmination in *Gone with the Wind*.

VIDEO

View online: https://tracs-prod.s3.rbx.io.cloud.ovh.net/assets/records/de-l-europe-a-hollywood-et-retour-le-symphonisme-hollywoodien/resources/gone-wind-generique-video.webm

> Opening credits for *Gone with the Wind* (1939). Music by Max Steiner

From 1936 to 1965, Steiner worked in the Warner Bros studio, where he meets Korngold, another exiled Austrian composer who went on to become a major figure of score writing.

Erich Wolfgang Korngold was born in Brünn (today Brno), in Moravia, on May 29, 1897, also to an influential musical family. His father, Julius Korngold, who was musical critic for *Neue freie Presse* and a musicologist, taught Erich music theory, harmony and piano. In 1901, his family moved to Vienna. Korngold began composing and received praise and encouragement from Strauss and Mahler, who recommended that he take composition courses with Alexander von Zemlinksy. He made his mark with his first works: ballet music and symphonic and chamber music. Following the opéra bouffe *The Ring of Polykrates* and the tragic opera *Violanta,* his opera *The Dead City* was a huge success. In 1927 he was named professor at the Vienna Staatsakademie (the same imperial academy where Steiner had studied), where he taught orchestra conducting and musical theory.

Korngold therefore enjoyed a measure of prestige when he left for Hollywood in 1934 at the invitation of Austrian film director Max Reinhardt, with whom he had collaborated on the operettas *The Bat* (1929) and *La Belle Hélène* (1931). This departure was not, however, definitive: Korngold made several round trips between the United States and Austria up until 1938. After having adapted Felix Mendelssohn's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for a Warner Brothers feature film (1935), he was given a contract by the studio, writing the scores for 18 films until 1946. He gained fame for his repeated collaboration with Michael Curtiz on the production of movies starring Errol Flynn, and for his specialization in swashbuckler movies (*Captain Blood*, 1935; *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, 1938; *The Sea Hawk*, 1940). Korngold shared time between Hollywood and Vienna, where he directed operas and prepared the creation of his last work, *Die Kathrin*. In January 1938, he returned to California to compose the score for *The Adventures of Robin Hood*. A short time after his departure, Austria was annexed by Hitler's Germany; his

house was confiscated by the Nazis; and the premier of his opera *Die Kathrin* was canceled as "degenerate art." Recognizing that Hollywood had probably saved his and his family's lives, he accepted Warner's offer and decided to stay in the United States until the end of the war, devoting himself entirely to movie scores.

At the end of the 1950s, the Classical Hollywood composers passed the torch to a second generation of film composers, born in America. This group was led by Bernard Herrmann and Elmer Bernstein, who extensively developed some specifically national musical idioms by integrating hymns, traditional melodies, and American folk music (modeled after Aaron Copland), and by making references to jazz, while still acknowledging what they had been taught by their elders from Europe.

European Musical Transpositions in The Classic Hollywood Film Score

Educated by major figures in the production of European Art music from the second half of the 19th century, and experienced in the writing of operas, operettas, and musicals, the pioneers of Classic Hollywood scoring quickly adapted to the necessities of film accompaniment. They transposed several writing styles and practices learned before their emigration, elaborating an audiovisual aesthetic that would come to dominate the world of Hollywood musical scores. In the framework of this transatlantic exchange, what traces of European symphonic music remained in the film scores of these composers?

The perpetuation of the tonal idiom, writing, and orchestration inherited from the 19th century is often emphasized as a marker of the Classic Hollywood Film Score. The harmonic language, however, is often rich, going well beyond the scope of German post-romanticism. It integrates the traditions of Brahms, Wagner, Mahler and Strauss, as well as the innovations of Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninov, Stravinsky, Ravel, Debussy and Bartok. Hollywood scores often place static harmonies against parallellisms, creating an ambiguity between tonality and modality. Simple chords, which are anchored in either a tonal idiom or an identifiable pole, are coupled with complex chords with frequent added notes—seventh, ninth or even eleventh—which blurs tonality, as in the opening theme for *Double Indemnity* (1944), written by the composer of Hungarian origin Miklós Rózsa.



Miklós Rózsa, opening theme from *Double Indemnity* (1944). Personal transcription

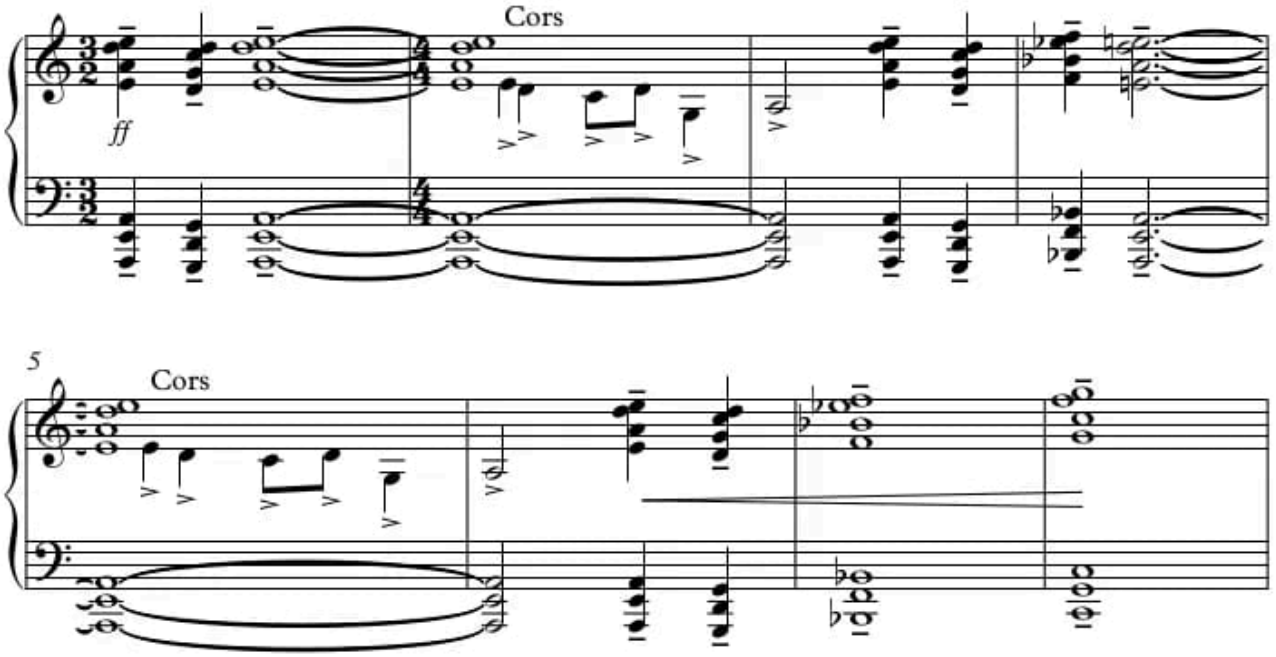
VIDEO

View online: https://tracs-prod.s3.rbx.io.cloud.ovh.net/assets/records/de-l-europe-a-hollywood-et-retour-le-symphonisme-hollywoodien/resources/double-indemnity-video.webm

Billy Wilder, opening credits for *Double Indemnity* (1944). Music by Miklós Rózsa

Composed in F minor, it is devoid of tonal stability: The tonality is never asserted, destabilized by multiple dissonances. In the vertical punctuations to the strings by sinister brass, Rózsa substitutes the tritone for the fifth of the dominant chord, then enriches the tonic with nonchord tones; most of the chords have at least four notes. The dissonant chord at the end of the sixth measure is followed by a layering of fourths (Ab—D—G—C); then, in the following measure, by an Ab chord in the second inversion, again preventing any feeling of resolution. From this perpetual non-resolution comes a strong tension, reinforced by both the throbbing repetition and by atypical phrasing of this seven-measure theme. The polarization of the theme in the bass and the heavy punctuations in the tympani give it a funeral-march quality. This somber and oppressive music particularly highlights the shot of a faceless black silhouette slowly and steadily advancing on crutches as it progressively blocks the entire screen. This suffocating frontal approach reinforces the feeling of fateful peril that emanates from the screen, foreshadowing from the beginning that this invalid will be an essential dramatic agent in the film.

Taking advantage of the diversity of eras explored by historical films, epic films or swashbucklers—Hollywood composers seek out unique colors adapted to a phantasmal re-creation, such as the parallelism of chords and the use of superposed fourth and fifth structures in the overture fanfare by Rózsa for *Ben-Hur* (1959), whose archaic resonances harken to the imagination of a distant and mythic past.



Miklós Rózsa, Overture fanfare from *Ben-Hur* (1959). Personal transcription

AUDIO RECORDING

View online: https://tracs-prod.s3.rbx.io.cloud.ovh.net/assets/records/de-l-europe-a-hollywood-et-retour-le-symphonisme-hollywoodien/resources/ben-hur-fanfare.mp3

Miklós Rózsa, Overture fanfare from *Ben-Hur* (1959)

Beyond the post-romantic coloring, the harmonic palette of the symphonists often includes modality, notably pentatonic or whole tone scales, applied liberally by Waxman for their dark and evil symbolism in *The Bride of Frankenstein* to characterize the new feminine creature.

AUDIO RECORDING

View online: https://tracs-prod.s3.rbx.io.cloud.ovh.net/assets/records/de-l-europe-a-hollywood-et-retour-le-symphonisme-hollywoodien/resources/the-bride-of-frankenstein-audio.mp3

Franz Waxman, opening credits for *The Bride of Frankenstein* (1935)

Apart from the genre and the period, the geographical setting is also addressed musically—by orientalist shapes using mobile scale degrees and augmented seconds (*Ben Hur*, 1959), by exotic touches (the "island music" composed by Steiner for *Bird of Paradise*, 1932) or in stylized "ethnic" music, such as tribal percussion associated with the indigenous people of Skull Island in *King Kong* (1933), which is characterized by the primacy of swift rhythmic figures hammered in a dense orchestration dominated by brass and drums evoking Stravinskian tremors.

AUDIO RECORDING

View online: https://tracs-prod.s3.rbx.io.cloud.ovh.net/assets/records/de-l-europe-a-hollywood-et-retour-le-symphonisme-hollywoodien/resources/theme-tribal-de-king-kong-audio.mp3

Max Steiner, tribal theme from *King Kong* (1933)

The integration of U.S. themes (traditional songs, folklore, hymns...) and references to jazz, though generally associated with the second generation of Hollywood composers, are also present in the works of Steiner (*Gone with the Wind*, 1939) and Waxman (*Crime in the Streets*, 1956). As common and mythicized American musical memories, these kinds of music thrive particularly in westerns (Steiner's *They Died with their Boots on*, 1941 and *The Searchers*, 1956).

Starting with *The Most Dangerous Game* (1932), Steiner contributes to the expansion of Hollywood formations into imposing post-romantic orchestral pieces, particularly suitable to large spaces, fantastical universes, and distant or primitive worlds. For example, the overture for *Land of the Pharaohs* (1955)—with its acoustic magnificence carried by the heavy and colorful orchestration of Tiomkin, an incessant and ever-advancing march rhythm, and a harmony alternating rich chords and parallel progressions—participates fully in the spectacularizing esthetic of the sword-and-sandal genre. Using large brass, woodwind, and percussion sections, as well as vocal and instrumental soloists, this music seems to spill out over the edges of the screen and echoes the monumental sets, multitudes of extras, and buzz of activity captured in the large-image format.

VIDEO

View online: https://tracs-prod.s3.rbx.io.cloud.ovh.net/assets/records/de-l-europe-a-hollywood-et-retour-le-symphonisme-hollywoodien/resources/la-terre-des-pharaons-video.webm

Howard Hawks, opening credit sequence and procession of Cheops in *The Land of the Pharoahs* (1955). Music by Dimitri Tiomkin

The overall effect and density of textures are made possible by the composers' ability to combine timbres and to place musicians and microphones during recording sessions, even when the size of the orchestra is somewhat small (only 40 instrumentalists for the richest pages of *The Bride of Frankenstein*, and only 46 for *King Kong*). Sensitive to the contributions of Claude Debussy and Maurice Ravel, the Classic

Hollywood composers enhance specific instruments bringing in touches of color or transparency, such as the harp, the glockenspiel, the celesta and the vibraphone (*Casablanca* by Steiner, 1942; *Double Indemnity* by Rózsa), plucked string instruments—guitar, banjo, mandolin, ukulele, *pizzicati*—and electronic instruments like the theremin (*The Thing from Another World* by Tiomkin, 1951; *Poison* and *Spellbound* by Rósza, 1945), or electronically amplified violin, used by Waxman in *Rebecca* (1940).

The scores of the Hollywood golden age assimilate many devices and forms from ballet, opera, operetta, and melodrama. The most salient structural appropriation is undoubtedly the adaptation of conventional operatic overtures and preludes to film credits, where they are transformed, condensed, and simplified to fit cinematic time constraints—the duration of opening credits is rarely more than two minutes.

VIDEO

View online: https://tracs-prod.s3.rbx.io.cloud.ovh.net/assets/records/de-l-europe-a-hollywood-et-retour-le-symphonisme-hollywoodien/resources/king-kong-generique-debut-video.webm

> Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Shoedsack, opening credits for *King Kong* (1933). Music by Max Steiner

The opening credit sequence of *King Kong* is part of the heritage of potpourri overtures from the 19th century; on this rousing orchestral page, the principal themes of the film, to be stated again and developed later, are juxtaposed in contrast, hinting at the genre and tone of the feature film. Accompanying the name of the studio, the descending chromatic three-note motif, heavy and unsettling, associated with the giant gorilla, is expressed *fff* in the lower register by brass over three octaves. A large *crescendo* brings the introduction of the tribal theme by the brass and percussion, counterpointed by swooping strings, and then developed as the overall rhythm accelerates in an upward chromatic progression. After a menacing call from the brass with the title "And King Kong (the 8^th^ Wonder of the World)", a slow, lyrical and melancholy theme is played by the strings, supported by arpeggios on harp, as we read the Arab proverb. This theme is associated with the love that Ann Darrow has for the sailor Jack Driscoll, as well as the relationship between Ann and Kong—suggested musically by the similar beginnings of the two themes. Visually, the vertical scanning of the screen by a beam of light, evocative of a Broadway show, also foreshadows the ape's capture and exposition to New Yorkers as a circus animal, all the while indicating "the introduction of a new kind of film to the spectators. [...] Theaters, right from the opening credits, are ready to welcome this new attraction whose name ends the credits: "King Kong, the 8th Wonder of the World." [2]

Another type of opening credit sequence, frequent in the scores of the same period, harkens more specifically to the overtures of the operas by Carl Maria von Weber, on the model of *Freischütz* (1821), condensing the forthcoming action in a sort of pre-scenario.

VIDEO

View online: https://tracs-prod.s3.rbx.io.cloud.ovh.net/assets/records/de-l-europe-a-hollywood-et-retour-le-symphonisme-hollywoodien/resources/casablanca-ouverture-video.webm

> Michael Curtiz, opening credit for *Casablanca* (1942). Music by Max Steiner

Casablanca is a clear example: the setting, Morocco, is straightaway depicted by a grandiose, twisting, and Orientalizing melody, colored by augmented seconds, by a stressed, syncopated ostinato accompaniment, and by an orchestration that gives primacy to percussion and shimmering timbres. The France of the Allies

and the Resistance is next symbolized by the national anthem (*la Marseillaise* is one of the main themes of the film), which ends with an unexpected and suggestive tense chord, indicating the uncertain outcome of the struggle against Nazi Germany. Along with the historical context, Steiner puts into place the somber atmosphere of the plot through a plaintive and lyrical theme, played primarily by the strings, on shots depicting the desperate and exhausting exodus of refugees (this theme reappears immediately afterward, when the crowd sees a plane pass above the city, symbolizing their hope to go to Lisbon, and then to America). Finally, an oriental theme is played on the oboe just as the action begins, and as the camera dives into the narrow streets of Casablanca.

Further removed from operatic practices, one last fairly widespread practice in the opening credit sequence for films in the golden age was the introduction of only the main character's theme.

VIDEO

View online: https://tracs-prod.s3.rbx.io.cloud.ovh.net/assets/records/de-l-europe-a-hollywood-et-retour-le-symphonisme-hollywoodien/resources/mildred-pierce-generique-video.webm

Michael Curtiz, opening credits for *Mildred Pierce* (1942). Music by Max Steiner

This is the case, for example, with *Mildred Pierce* (1945). Mildred's theme, formed by two lyrical phrases and an ample melodic curve, is articulated in D*b* major by the strings synchronized with the appearance of the film title that carries the name of the heroine, straightforwardly tying the music to its referent. The theme is then developed and articulated one last time, and a tympani roll and a cymbal crash are used to emphasize the name Jerry Wald, conforming to the convention of musically highlighting a film's producer. In the opening scene that follows, the theme is articulated again just after Monte pronounces Mildred's first name, finalizing the association between the theme and the character.

Beyond the formal codifications, the very function of the Classical Hollywood composers' scores finds its roots in romantic and post-romantic program music. The emotional, dramatic, and narrative roles given to the orchestra derive directly from the arguments of the supporters of this "music of the Future", defended by Liszt, Wagner and Berlioz. Along with the geographic and temporal setting, the score expresses the interior temperaments of the characters, giving distinction to their identities and personalities, all the while reinforcing the atmosphere of the scenes by highlighting certain actions or words, taking care to maintain the music-image correspondence that was important to all the Classic Hollywood composers. Steiner often points to his wish to musically follow the inflections of the image through a very synchronous approach, his ideal being that the music "fit with the scene like a glove." [3] His practice is thus summarized by Pierre Berthomieu:

> *The composer adapts the notion of total drama to the cinema, where music is a character entirely apart. [...] Just as the opera of Wagner conceives a constant interaction between music, the movement of characters and the text, with its alliterations and exclamations, Steiner writes musical dramas in interaction with the elements of the image, the scenery and the placement of the dialogues.* [16]

On a small scale, highlighting detail, the Hollywood composers include devices that had long been used in art music. Just like Wagner or Ravel (without mentioning *The Rite of Spring*!), certain musical themes are written to be synchronous with dramatic actions of a particular symbolic importance: oaths, jumps, falls,

mortal blows, jolts and thrusts in combat. [4]

This punctual emphasis of certain actions by music, which took the name of *mickey-mousing* in reference to Walt Disney's cartoons where the method was particularly widespread, is often criticized and reduced to the notion of music-image redundancy. The music does not, however, imitate; it completes and enhances the image through a process of stylization. In addition, *mickey-mousing* can be only punctual, or it can be a carrier of thematic or symbolic developments; thus, the musical emphasis on the heavy step of Kong is done using his descending chromatic motif, expressed from the opening credit sequence. [5] *The Most Dangerous Game* opens on a plaintive call of horns (downward minor third) before the closed door of a fortress, followed by tremolo chromatic rise, and interrupted three times by a hand pounding a knocker into the massive door.



Ernest B. Shoedsack and Irving Pichel, screen shot from the opening of *The Most Dangerous Game* (1932)

AUDIO RECORDING

View online: https://tracs-prod.s3.rbx.io.cloud.ovh.net/assets/records/de-l-europe-a-hollywood-et-retour-le-symphonisme-hollywoodien/resources/ouverture-musicale-comte-zaroff-audio.mp3

Max Steiner, musical overture for *The Most Dangerous Game* (1932)

Beyond the jointly evocative call of sounds and music, the accompaniment stresses the crucial importance of the owner of the fortress—a Count who has gone crazy, attracting sailors to his island where he cultivates his new passion, hunting men—and of what is behind the door (Rainsford and Eve must push open the iron door of the trophy room to discover the macabre pastime of the Count), all the while evoking the world of hunting, presented under a sinister and diabolical light. The wounded Centaur on the

knocker, carrying an unconscious woman, is also seen on a tapestry in the castle and anticipates the mortal wound to Zaroff. The call of the horns not only becomes the recurring theme of the hunt in the film, but also generates the principal theme, a Russian waltz associated with the Count.

On a larger scale, as with the ballets, operas, melodramas or symphonic poems of the late 19th century, the quest for symbiosis between music and image is reflected in orchestral ebbs and flows: changes in musical expression and harmonic colors, transitions, passing from one theme to the other, repetitions, and thematic transformations. All of these are also brought together to create a feeling of continuity by "smoothing" the film editing. In the creation scene at the end of *The Bride of Frankenstein*, "the first important score entirely written for a Universal movie" [6], the dense and uninterrupted orchestral fabric guides the narration by juxtaposing various motifs and transitional segments, giving musical form to the Bride, whose theme runs through different instrumental sections and registers before she is actually revealed. Starting with the opening credit sequence, the creature is musically identified, but her unveiling on screen is delayed using a method characteristic of fantasy films.



Franz Waxman, Bride's theme in *The Bride of Frankenstein* (1935). Personal transcription

VIDEO

View online: https://tracs-prod.s3.rbx.io.cloud.ovh.net/assets/records/de-l-europe-a-hollywood-et-retour-le-symphonisme-hollywoodien/resources/creation-de-la-fiancee-de-frankenstein.webm

James Whale, Creation of the Bride in *The Bride of Frankenstein* (1935). Music by Franz Waxman

The lowering of the giant electric conductor is dramatized by successive downward chromaticism, as Waxman offers several musical equivalents for the electric crackling and lightning during the storm. The arrival of the monster (Boris Karloff) is announced through an acidic and dissonant theme in the brass section. An aggregate chord accompanies Karl's mortal fall, thrown from the tower by the monster, just before the Bride's theme is triumphantly heard during the lowering of her body into the laboratory.



Franz Waxman, The monster's theme in *The Bride of Frankenstein*. Personal transcription

Simultaneously articulating the inexorable awakening of the creature and suggesting a pulse before her first gesture, the hammering, regular, funeral-procession style rhythm of the tympani over the whole scene is also the last musical element to be heard when the Bride is liberated from her shackles.

The music is often ahead of the narrative, or the immediate action, thus creating foreshadowing effects. At the beginning of *Rebecca*, for example, when Maxim de Winter rails against the naiveté of the young woman (Joan Fontaine) during a car ride, the marked lyricism of Waxman's music suggests the beginnings of romance between the two characters, made concrete some scenes later, thus softening Maxim's harshness and the young woman's tears. [7]

Critics and Scholars, however, have perhaps written most about the notion of *leitmotiv* and its introduction into movies.

Leitmotiv and its Misunderstandings

The very expression "Hollywood Musical Drama" [8] reveals through direct reference that the study of American movie music is inextricably linked to Wagnerian drama. The *leitmotiv* is closely tied to Wagner, though he is not its inventor; the term was made popular by the German theoretician Hans von Wolzogen. Still today, it is a term whose definition and accepted uses vary by author. A summary of the essential characteristics of *leitmotiv* will allow us to examine a number of misunderstandings regarding its integration into the Hollywood system:

1. It is a short, recurrent and essentially melodic, rhythmic, timbral or harmonic motif associated to a concrete or abstract extra-musical referent. 2) It can be used in a narrative and representational framework, while still being part of a larger musical structure where it is intimately tied to the symbolic core of the drama. 3) Transformed through multiple reprises, the process excludes almost any literal repetition. 4) Taken as a whole, *leitmotivs* are organically related, and can be layered or intertwined.

For the screen, the process clearly cannot function in the same way as in the vast Wagnerian dramas, if only because of the specific time restrictions placed on movies. Furthermore, because the cinematic narrative thread is most often made up of a series of successive musical inserts, it is incompatible with the continuous and simultaneous movement of drama and music together. In movies, the musical accompaniment and the outlay of themes are defined first and foremost by the image, editing and narration. Moreover, musical editors play a fundamental role in determining the musical architecture of a movie, as they have the power to cut, delete, or make other uses of sections of the score. This has made way for a sometimes narrow and stereotypical conception of the use of *leitmotiv* in Hollywood movies, often reduced to a semantic and descriptive label.

It is problematic that the composers themselves chose to use this term to describe their approach, because they essentially reduce the meaning of *leitmotiv* to that of a character's theme. This narrow point of view hardly does justice to their actual practice, which evolved considerably over the years in Steiner's case. The words of the composers must be questioned; they proceed, on one hand, from a musical vulgarization and self-promotion, and, on the other hand, from a process of cultural legitimation. The comparisons to opera and Wagner—especially by Steiner—at the moment when Classic Hollywood film music was developing into a concrete aesthetics, is significant; they are part of a quest for prestige and recognition for movie music, and an effort to raise it to the status of art.

Following the composers' use of it, the word *leitmotiv* was relatively overused by numerous scholars, theoreticians, and critics using a less-than-adequate definition, as a synonym of "recurring theme," with which it is often confused. The term *leitmotiv*, however, is far from applicable to all the principal thematic materials of a movie, as has been shown in recent research. In *Now, Voyager* (1942) for example, only the themes of Charlotte's feelings and transformation, and that of the mother/daughter relationship are true

leitmotivs, since the other five simple and recurring themes essentially serve to guide the audience by offering a clear musical identification; as such, they are closer to the musical traditions of theater and silent film than to the Wagnerian process.

When the *leitmotiv* is truly present, it contributes to an enrichment of the narration through its successive transformations according to the story and the new dramatic and emotional contexts, which it reflects and helps to generate at the same time. Its repetition under always varying forms sheds light on its referent from multiple angles, while the thematic derivations and organic relations between *leitmotivs* create "an extra dramatic interweaving that increases the density of the movie." [9]

Several factors explain the various forms of appropriation, language adaptation and writing techniques of European music of the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. The origins, education and prior production of the major composers that created the influential model of the Classic Hollywood score obviously play a significant role. Korngold, especially, whose career turned very early toward stage music, conceived his original soundtracks as "operas without singing" or "symphonically dramatic music which fits the pucture." [10] Viennese waltzes and marches abound in his entire catalogue, as they do in Steiner's. The composers also perpetuate practices that were already widespread starting with silent films, where the "incident catalogs" devised for accompanying movies brought together famous art and popular music scores from the 18th and 19th centuries for specific dramatic use, scored for piano or played by a live orchestra which, starting in the 1920s, was no longer just the prerogative of just the larger venues, but tended to be the norm.

But this biographical information alone does not explain the introduction to movies of a specific European symphonic tradition that is both "classical" and popular. This tradition is assimilated during the emergence of talkies especially because it meets the needs of Classical Hollywood movies regarding narrative function, and quest for continuity in the association of image, dialogue, and sound. It is also closely tied to several technical improvements in recording and editing (the Vitaphone process where music is recorded to vinyl and synchronized with the projector, then inscribed on the edge of the film with the advent of "optical" sound) that allow relatively precise sound synchronization. This audiovisual aesthetic became the norm in Hollywood music for more than 25 years, giving rise to critiques and controversies on the other side of the Atlantic.

A "Formidable Pathos"? The Contrasted Reception of The Classic Hollywood Film Score in Europe

The positioning of composers and theoreticians in relation to the Classic Hollywood Film Score reveals the power relations in an area tied both to mass industry and to the effort to create a specific identity through a different vision of movie scoring, particularly in France.

Maurice Jaubert, considered the father of French movie music and identified with the aesthetic of "poetic realism," is one of the first European musicians to express resistance to this form of Hollywood cultural hegemony. In a well-known talk given in London in 1936, he castigated the practice of synchronism and the length of classic American compositions. Citing some scenes from *The Lost Patrol* (1934) and *The Informer* by Steiner, he condemned both the reduction of the score to a redundant explanation of the film, and the prevalence of stereotypical uses of music like *mickey-mousing*. To him, the exacerbated lyricism of

Classic Hollywood scores was nothing but a "formidable pathos"; the Hollywood scores bring together "the least desirable of Wagnerian formulas [...] and Debussy-mimicking sweetness." His choice of words is revealing.

For Jaubert, refusing the Hollywood model was, in Jean Cocteau's words, a way to "escape from Germany." [11] Jaubert brought together the shared fears of many French composers in the first third of the 20th century that Germanic influence, notably Wagner, would bring about a loss of French identity. But Jaubert also defended an original approach to movie score composition, founded on the idea of music's poetic detachment, where music is conceived as a discourse parallel to that of the film, there to "deepen the visual impression" without trying to "explain the images." [12] Far from the thematic developments of Hollywood, the composer sought concision, brevity and sobriety, favoring smaller instrumental ensembles. In a revealing way, he makes the rhythm—not the melody—the foundation of his aesthetic and this musical rhythm, which is autonomous, can match those of the visual movements, the film editing or some element of the sound effects. The composer tries in any case to encompass sound effects and music into the same logical sequence by creating sound-music fade-outs. By his claims, Jaubert laid out a "French" model for composing music for the screen, and this model is recognizable in the following generations, particularly among the composers associated with New Wave, such as Georges Delerue, for whom Jaubert becomes a veritable guru.

The position of French composers in relation to Hollywood music is not, however, without ambiguity. In the 1960s, young New Wave filmmakers developed a genuine admiration for the American movies of Alfred Hitchcock, Howard Hawks and Nicholas Ray, occasionally encouraging their musicians to emulate Hollywood scores for their own movies. François Truffaut's enthusiasm for Bernard Herrmann is well known: he called on the American composer for the music of *Fahrenheit 451* (1966) and *The Bride Wore Black* (1968). In his last film, *Confidentially Yours* (1983), he asked Delerue to use Steiner and Waxman as models, in order to "recreate the nocturnal, mysterious and brilliant atmosphere of American police comedies that once enchanted us" [13] and the atmosphere of the *film noir* genre, like *The Big Sleep* (1946). This apparent contradiction illustrates perhaps, in some cases, a sort of discrepancy between the personal convictions of the composers, and the entrenched need to distinguish themselves from American movie music in a shared, engaged, nationalist aesthetic discourse.

Other influential European intellectuals expressed strong defiance regarding Hollywood scores, which they judged to be conservative because of their assimilation of a language considered out-of-date at the dawn of the Second World War, and out-of-touch with the paths explored by "art music" since the emergence of the Second Vienna School and its moderate integration of avant-garde writing techniques. In their engaged essay from 1944, which is also one of the first major works on movie music, Theodor W. Adorno and Hanns Eisler vigorously criticize the use of *leitmotiv* in movies, which can never go beyond having an indicative value. To the extent that it can neither be developed at length nor within a large musical form because of the disjointedness of film editing and the sometimes abrupt changes of scene that lead to incessant interruptions of the musical flow, *leitmotiv* becomes a simple characterization of its referent, a "musical valet," in short, at great pains to attain the symbolic and metaphysical qualities that it acquires in Wagnerian dramas. The authors also condemn Hollywood music's primary recourse to a "prefabricated" language inherited from Romantic music. This type of language, they say, conveys pre-established and fixed references, clichés and "automated associations" [14], thus confining musical accompaniment to an imitative and descriptive role.



Cover of the French translation of *Musique de cinema* [1944] by Theodor W. Adorno and Hanns Eisler. Paris, L'Arche, 1972

The condemnation of the Hollywood model leads Adorno and Eisler to support the use of "modern" music (atonal and serial); to the extent that this music avoids the pitfalls of redundancy and musical illustration, it seems the only kind of music capable of creating new relationships between music and image, preferably through non-coincidence and dissociation between the two. The categorical rejection of movie music—particularly the Hollywood model, whose language is deemed conventional—is shared by most of the major figures of avant-garde movements.

The end of Korngold's career best illustrates this tension. After the Second World War, the Austrian musician tried to go back to Europe, but he hardly found the renown he had enjoyed in his youth. After the triumph of *The Dead City*, his opera *The Miracle of Heliane* (1927) and his operetta *The Silent Serenade* (1946) received mediocre and even calamitous reviews. Already denigrated in Germany—where Berlin becomes the center of musical modernity—before his establishment in the United States, the style of his symphonic works seemed especially conservative, outdated and "flat" in post-war Austria and Germany, and too closely associated with Hollywood scoring. The critique of the composer by Otto Klemperer is particularly revealing when he opines that, in truth, "Korngold had *always* composed for Warner Brothers, he just didn't realize it." [15] After several European failures, Korngold went back to Hollywood, where he died at the age of 60.

At the turn of the 21st century, a new musical aesthetic is born in French cinema, in movies like *Sur mes lèvres* (2001), *Swimming Pool* (2003), *Confidences trop intimes* (2004) and *La Tourneuse de pages* (2006). Theorized by Cécile Carayol, "intimate symphonism" operates within a distinctive synthesis of the fundamental principles of Classic Hollywood scoring—symphonic orchestra, post-romantic writing,

narrative and empathetic music—rethought and reappropriated by French composers. It is an approach more directly in line with the heritage of French movie music—transparent timbres, punctual musical interventions, reserved rather than expansive lyricism—and the American minimalism of the 1960s. This new form of symphonism, going beyond national and ideological divisions discussed above, is perhaps the most vivid incarnation of European re-exportation and reappropriation of the Hollywood model, which was itself born in great part from the music of the Old Continent.

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NOTES

1 Music whose source exists concretely in the fictional universe, and that the characters either hear or interpret themselves.

2 Gérard Dastigue, *Le Corps du cinéma. Musique de film et réception spectatorielle dans le cinéma hollywoodien Classique,* (Lille: ANRT, 2006), 157.

3 Cited in James Buhler, David Neumeyer and Rob Deemer, *Hearing the Movies. Music and Sound in Film History* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2010), 105.

4 Michel Chion, *La musique au cinéma,* (Paris: Fayard, 1995), 123-124.

5 See Berthomieu, *Hollywood Classique*, 170, for similar examples in *Of Human Bondage* (1934), *The informer* (1935) and *The Three Musketeers* (1935).

6 Dastigue, *Le Corps du cinema*, 169.

7 For a more detailed analysis of the functioning of the score in *Rebecca*, see Buhler, Neumeyer and Deemer, *Hearing the Movies*, 244-247 and 266-269.

8 Berthomieu, *Hollywood Classique*, 159.

9 Berthomieu. *Hollywood classique*, 173.

10 See Anna G. Piotrowska, "'Vienna Touch' in Hollywood: Viennese-Born/Educated Composers and Early Film Scores", in Joshua Parker and Ralph J. Poole (eds.), *Austria and America: Cross-Cultural Encounters 1865-1933,* (Berlin: LIT, 2014), 104.

11 Jean Cocteau, *Le Coq et L'Arlequin. Notes autour de la musique,* (Paris: La sirène, 1918), 42.

12 All the quotes come from Maurice Jaubert, "Les Arts, Le Cinéma. Petite école du spectateur (suite). La Musique", *Esprit,* number 43, (April 1936): 114-119.

13 Letter from François Truffaut to Gérard Lebovici dated September 9, 1982, and quoted in Chloé Huvet, "*Vivement Dimanche !* de Georges Delerue (1983): un hommage distancié aux films classiques américains", in Jérôme Rossi (ed.), *La musique de film en France: courants, spécificités, évolutions,* (Lyon: Symétrie, 2016), 139

14 Theodor W. Adorno and Hanns Eisler, *Musique de cinema* [1944], (Paris: L'Arche, 1972), 15, 42 and 44.

15 Quoted in Sullivan, *New World Symphonies*, 165.

16 Pierre Berthomieu, *Hollywood Classique. Le temps des géants.* (Pertuis: Rouge Profond, 2009), 161.