

FILM MUSIC

A NEGLECTED ART

A Critical Study of Music in Films

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The Aesthetics of Film Music

What is it, exactly, that music contributes to a film? David Raksin has written that music's avowed purpose in films is "to help realize the meaning of a film." Aaron Copland has said that a composer can do no more than "make potent through music the film's dramatic and emotional value." Both observations approach a general answer to the question. We shall divide this question further into five rather broad areas, taking a detailed look at each. The main headings are Aaron Copland's, drawn from his article in *The New York Times* of November 6, 1949; the discussion that follows each heading is the author's work.

"Music can create a more convincing atmosphere of time and place."

There are a variety of ways of achieving an atmosphere of time and place, or, musically speaking, "color." In a broad sense, musical color may be taken to represent the exotic or sensuous aspects of music, as distinct from musical structure, or line, which might be considered the intellectual side. Although admittedly an oversimplification, this distinction has a good deal of validity in terms of film music. Film music is overwhelmingly coloristic in its intention and effect. This is always true when a composer is attempting to create an atmosphere of time and place.

Color is associative—bagpipes call up images of Scotland, the oboe easily suggests a pastoral scene, muted brass connotes something sinister, rock music may imply a youthful theme, and so on. Also, color is not intrusive; it does not compete with the dramatic action. This is especially important for film music. The effect of color, moreover, is *immediate*, unlike musical thematic development, which takes time. In addition, color is highly flexible and can be brought in and out with relative ease by the experienced screen composer. An important quality of color, given the short amount of time the composer usually has to write a feature score, is that color is easier to achieve than musical design. Finally, and probably most important of all, color can be readily understood by a musically unsophisticated film audience.

Musical color can be achieved in a variety of ways. One is to use musical material indigenous to the locale of a film. Thus Adolph Deutsch employed sea chanteys in *Action on the North Atlantic*, and Alfred Newman used street songs and hurdy-gurdy music in *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*. A related technique is the use of musical devices that are popularly associated with foreign lands and people; for example, using the pentatonic idiom to achieve an Oriental color. The “Chinese” music written for a studio film of the 1930s and ’40s is not, of course, authentic Chinese music but rather represents our popular Occidental notions of what Chinese music is like. The Western listener simply does not understand the symbols of authentic Oriental music as he does those of Western music; therefore, Oriental music would have little dramatic effect for him.

Along the same lines, there is the problem of stylistic integration. This arises when composers are required to use set pieces of music for purposes of color within the larger framework of their score. Such set pieces can include folk songs, music for fairs, street cries, dances, and so on. It is far better for the composer to arrange these pieces himself so that they conform stylistically with the rest of his music for the picture. The folk-song arrangements of Bartók indicate ample precedent for this. The problem can be avoided entirely if the composer creates his own atmosphere music. An example of this is Bernard Herrmann’s hurdy-gurdy music for *Hangover Square*. The film’s climax includes the performance of a piano concerto written specially for the film and Herrmann simply took one of the concerto themes and transformed it into the hurdy-gurdy music.

Stylistic parody* is another coloristic device, and one that has been only slightly cultivated in film music. Examples can be found in Hugo Friedhofer’s score to *The Bishop’s Wife*, wherein he uses a concerto-grosso style, and in David Raksin’s score to *Forever Amber*, in the pseudo-Handelian music for the amusing scene in the king’s antechamber (a portion of this music can be seen in Figure 1). Few composers are capable of carrying off stylistic parody, for it takes an intimate sense of another’s compositional style.

Figure 1. Excerpt from *Forever Amber*, music by David Raksin.



This emphasis on color does not mean that musical line should or does go unused, however. The primary reason film composers have traditionally stayed away from complex line and structure in music is that such complicated structures cannot successfully be emphasized without competing with the dramatic action; i.e., it is bad film music. The answer to the problem of color and line, as it applies to film music, is that musical color can, to an extent, be created just as effectively by the confluence of

* Parody, as used here, refers to the musical procedure common in the latter part of the sixteenth century and exemplified in such works as Josquin’s *Mass Malheur me bat*. The somewhat unfortunate term, of 19th-century German coinage, refers only to a method of composition and is not intended to have a pejorative meaning.

individualized lines (a more contrapuntal texture) as by the arbitrary piling up of dissonance in a chord. Examples of this kind of contrapuntal coloristic writing abound in the scores of both David Raksin and Hugo Friedhofer. Raksin's score for the little-known film *The Redeemer* is full of canons and fugatos; Friedhofer's score to *Joan of Arc* has several highly contrapuntal sequences.

"Music can be used to underline or create psychological refinements—the unspoken thoughts of a character or the unseen implications of a situation."

Frequently, music can imply a psychological element far better than dialogue can. This use of film music is perhaps most effective when it is planned well in advance—when the film is in the scripting stage. Far too often, however, this possibility is passed over and music is not allowed to speak. Copland has observed that music "can play upon the emotions of the spectator, sometimes counterpointing the thing seen with an aural image that implies the contrary of the thing seen." Although music in film can be most effective in such instances, composers are given little chance to use it.

One of the classic examples of this kind of writing is found in David Raksin's score to *Force of Evil*, discussed in some detail in chapter 3. In the final scene the main character, Joe (John Garfield), is seen running in the street, then along a great stone wall and down a huge flight of stairs. Yet the music here is not "running" music—Raksin has scored the emotional rather than the physical character of the scene. Joe has been running, figuratively, throughout the film; it is only now, as he begins the search for his dead brother's body, that he finds any sort of quietude. Raksin reflects this psychological point in his slow music for this sequence.

The ability of music to make a psychological point in film is a subtle one, and perhaps its most valuable contribution. Yet film theoreticians appear not even to recognize music's possibilities in this area. For example, George Bluestone, in his book *Novels into Film*, states that "the film, being a presentational medium (except for its use of dialogue) cannot have direct access to the power of discursive forms. The rendition of mental states—memory, dream, imagination—cannot be as adequately represented by film as by language. . . . The film, by arranging external

signs for our visual perception, or by presenting us with dialogue, can lead us to infer thought. But it cannot show us thought directly. It can show us characters thinking, feeling, and speaking, but it cannot show us their thoughts and feelings. A film is not thought; it is perceived."

This quote demonstrates the typical naïveté of most film theoreticians concerning the possibilities of music in films. If by the word "film" Bluestone means a total work (i.e., visuals, dialogue, sound effects, and music) then his statement is totally invalid, for music can and does serve just this function better than any other element of film.

Composer Leonard Rosenman has pointed out that "film music has the power to change naturalism [in films] into reality. Actually, the musical contribution to the film should be ideally to create a *supra-reality*, a condition wherein the elements of literary naturalism are perceptually altered. In this way the audience can have the insight into different aspects of behavior and motivation not possible under the aegis of naturalism.

"Film music must thus enter directly into the 'plot' of the film, adding a third dimension to the images and words. It is an attempt to establish the *supra-reality* of a many-faceted portrayal of behavior that should motivate the composer in the selection of sequences to be scored and, just as important, the sequences to be left silent."

While music certainly does have the catalytic ability to change the audience's perception of images and words, it is worth pointing out that there is a corollary: the effect of the image and words upon the music. A simple recollection by composer Leonard Rosenman should suffice to make the point. Rosenman says, "There is a symbiotic catalytic exchange-relationship between the film and the music that accompanies it. I have personally had the experience of hearing musically unenlightened people comment positively and glowingly on a 'dissonant' score after seeing the film. I have played these same people records of the score without telling them that it came from the film they had previously seen. Their reaction ranged from luke-warm to positive rejection. . . ."

"Music can serve as a kind of neutral background filler."

Aaron Copland has said of "background" music: "This is really the kind of music one isn't supposed to hear, the sort that helps to fill the empty spots between pauses in a conversation. It's the movie composer's

most ungrateful task. But at times, though no one else may notice, he will get private satisfaction from the thought that music of little intrinsic value, through professional manipulation, has enlivened and made more human the deathly pallor of a screen shadow. This is hardest to do . . . when the neutral filler type of music must weave its way underneath dialogue."

This can sometimes be the film composer's most difficult task for it calls for him to be at his most subordinate. At times one of the functions of film music is to do nothing more than be there, "as though it would exist as sound rather than as 'constructed' music." Even though it is filling a rather subordinate role to other elements in the picture, "filler" type music is in fact a very conscious dramatic device. Hugo Friedhofer's score to *Broken Arrow* offers two outstanding examples of how this can be masterfully handled.

Figure 2. Excerpt from *Broken Arrow*, music by Hugo Friedhofer.



The first example (Figure 2) is the underscoring for a scene at the beginning of the film. In this scene the film's star, James Stewart, is riding

on horseback through the Western desert. Pictorially the setting is spacious, immobile, and quiet. The slow gait of the horse is the only sign of life; the hero is meditative, and a narrator starts the story on its way. Even though the inner parts are extremely simple, they still make music by themselves. There is just enough harmony in the outer parts to keep the solo clarinet from competing with the narrator's voice, and just enough mobility in the inner parts to counteract the rather static monotony of the double pedal.

The other example (Figure 3) of Friedhofer's from *Broken Arrow* is music accompanying a wedding ceremony. The tender, delicate melody, cast in the aeolian mode, is so well suited to its purpose that Lawrence Morton was moved to say that it "shows how it is possible to avoid the pitfall of an Apache *Lohengrin*."

Figure 3. Excerpt from *Broken Arrow*.



There are times when music accompanying dialogue can take on a definite foreground character. An example of this is in the film *The Heiress* (see chapter 3). Generally, such music is treated musically in a

conscious of this particular attribute of music in films. In a montage, particularly, music can serve an almost indispensable function: it can hold the montage together with some sort of unifying musical idea. Without music the montage can, in some instances, become merely chaotic. Music can also develop this sense of continuity on the level of the film as a whole. This idea is discussed in greater detail in chapter 7.

"Music can provide the underpinning for the theatrical buildup of a scene and then round it off with a sense of finality."

Music has a way of bypassing the human's normal, rational defense mechanisms. When used properly, music can help build the drama in a scene to a far greater degree of intensity than any of the other cinematic arts. It is of little significance whether the scene involves an intimate love relationship or a violent fight; music evokes a gut reaction unobtainable in any other way. On the other hand, this can be one of the least effective uses of film music if not handled properly. In fact, many producers and directors seem to feel this is film music's only function in a film—especially if the film is inherently weak. Every composer who has worked in film has, at one time or another, been asked to provide music for a weak scene in the hopes that the music will somehow make the scene stronger. It simply cannot be done, and it is then the composer who usually but unfairly receives the critic's blame for a scene poorly executed.

One wonders if some of the objections to music in films is that it is *too* effective. We tend to react to music whether we desire to or not and if we don't wish to be moved by it, we resent its presence for making us begin to lose control of our rational, "sophisticated" defenses.

Of course, there are times in a film, perhaps even entire films, when any kind of music is inappropriate. One critic, writing about the film *Sunset Boulevard*, said: "The plain fact is that the script of *Sunset Boulevard*, with its use of both narration and dialogue, and its realization through the camera, is so complete as to leave music not much to do." This certainly *can* be the case, but it is not true of most films. Films usually lack music because a producer or director did not want it. To them, music impinges on a sense of "realism." "Where's the music coming from?" is the oft-quoted question. This question was raised during Hitchcock's filming of *Lifeboat*. On hearing that Hitchcock had asked, "But where is the music

supposed to come from out in the middle of the ocean?" composer David Raksin replied: "Ask Mr. Hitchcock where the cameras come from." * The answer, unfortunately for the film composer, demonstrates more intelligence and perception than the question. The film composer must understand more about every other aspect of the filmmaker's craft than any other individual involved in the production. Since the composer is usually called in on the project after the film is complete, he must know what the director, cinematographer, actors, and editor are all trying to say dramatically. Without this dramatic sense for film, the composer is lost and his contribution to the film will be negligible.

A famous example of what purports to be a totally fused relationship of music and picture is the "audiovisual score" constructed by Sergei Eisenstein of a sequence from *Alexander Nevsky*. Because this example is used frequently in film classes and because the assumption that it is a totally fused relationship of music and picture is wholly incorrect, a critique of its essential points are in order.

Figure 6 shows that Eisenstein has constructed a diagram of the "picture rhythm" as well as the "musical movement," for he considers the two to be identical. "Now let us collate the two graphs," he writes in his book *The Film Sense*, "What do we find? Both graphs of movement correspond absolutely, that is, we find a complete correspondence between the movement of the music and the movement of the eye over the lines of the plastic composition. In other words, exactly the same motion lies at the base of both the musical and the plastic structures."

Two areas in this "correspondence" between picture and music are highly questionable. The first is the relationship of the rhythm of the music to the rhythm of the picture. The identification of musical and visual rhythms is dubious because in the plastic arts the concept of rhythm is largely metaphorical. Here the problem for Eisenstein is compounded, as his graphs refer to single shots, not to the time relation between them.

The second area in which Eisenstein's views are questionable deals with the idea that the graphs are supposed to prove that the actual movement

* In my research I have seen this famous reply attributed respectively to David Raksin, a sound technician, Lionel Barrymore, and someone in the studio music department. Some checking with those present at the time, however, proved beyond any doubt that it was Raksin who came up with this famous comment.

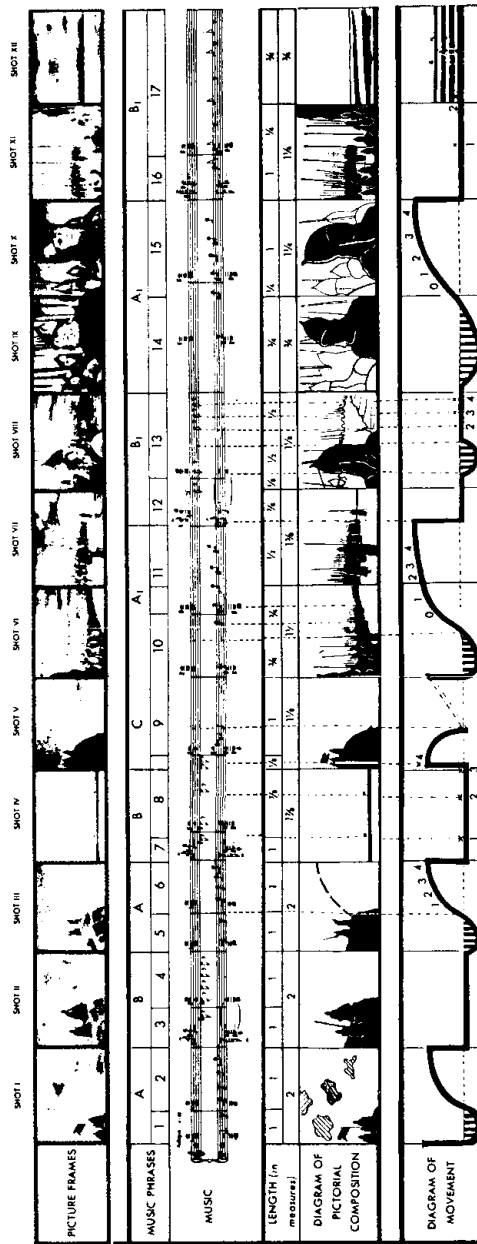


Figure 6. "Audiovisual score" from *Alexander Nevsky*, directed by Sergei Eisenstein, music by Sergei Prokofiev. This oft-used example of what purports to be a totally fused relationship of music and picture is seriously flawed. Excerpt from *The Film Sense* by Sergei Eisenstein. Translated and edited by Jay Leyda. Copyright 1942, by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc. and renewed 1970 by Jay Leyda. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

of the music is similar to the sequence of pictures. In reality, what the graph proves is that there is a similarity between the *notation* of the music and the picture sequence. This is an extremely important and crucial distinction upon which the whole of Eisenstein's premise rests. But Eisenstein's comparison is a bogus one, for musical notation is merely a graphic fixation of actual musical movement, "the static image of a dynamic phenomenon," according to Hanns Eisler. Music is an art that moves *through* time, an art that cannot be perceived instantaneously; whereas, in Eisenstein's graph, the pictures are perceived instantly. And while it is possible for the film director, through the composition of his shot, to control somewhat the direction of the viewer's eye movement across the frame, there is no way to control the rhythm or pace of that movement. In shot IV in the diagram, two flags are visible on the horizon. Eisenstein correlates these two flags to two eighth notes in the music. Because these two flags are vertical images and in direct conflict with the primary horizontal composition of the shot, they are recognized instantly by the eye. The music, however, is quite another matter. Using Prokofiev's tempo marking of *Largo* ♩ = 48, it takes approximately 4 seconds from the time shot IV appears on the screen to the appearance of the first specified eighth note on the sound track. It is another 2½ seconds before the second eighth note is heard. The point is that the recognition of the metaphorical picture rhythm of shot IV is instantaneous, while the musical rhythm that Eisenstein claims corresponds to the picture rhythm takes 6½ seconds to be perceived.

Another example of this sort of faulty comparison can be seen in Shot V. The music supposedly imitates the steeply sloping rocks by descending down a triad. The descent down the triad in the music actually has the appearance of a precipitously falling curve in the notation. But the problem here is that in the music itself the fall occurs *in time*, while the steeply sloping rock in Shot V is seen as unchanged from the first note to the last.

A further objection has to do with the development of the sequence and the music. If we are to accept Eisenstein's thesis of a correspondence between the music and the picture, then we can assume that the musical development will match that of the motion picture. The music then should show some distinction between the close-up and the panoramic views of the film.

However, a close examination of both music and picture will reveal that

just the opposite is true, for here the picture moves on while the music merely marks time. For instance, there is a clear difference in the stage of development between the first three shots, which show a good amount of detail, and shot IV, which is a general view of the battle line. But an examination of the music will show that measures 5 through 8 literally repeat measures 1 through 4. In this instance Eisenstein's repeated suggestion that picture and music should correspond in movement goes unnoticed. Alluding again to shot IV, the two eighth notes representing the flags also are heard in the music accompanying shot II, which does not show any flags. If Eisenstein wishes to be so pedantic in translating picture details into music, he should at least make the pedantry consistent. Instead, Eisenstein seems to practice such pedantry one moment and then forgets it in the next.

What Prokofiev seems to be doing with the music at this point is catching the general tension of this pre-battle moment. In other words, the music is speaking to the psychology of the moment (i.e., apprehension, fear) in terms of the characters involved rather than to any abstract notion of shot development or metaphorical "picture rhythm."

Film theoreticians refuse to give up their idea that this example represents the ultimate wedding of music and picture. For example, John Howard Lawson in his book, *Film: The Creative Process*, decries the fact that "the experimental work initiated by Eisenstein and Prokofiev in *Alexander Nevsky* has not been appreciated in theory or utilized in practice." This support of Eisenstein's concept of an "audiovisual score" on the part of film theoreticians is a result of their highly limited and superficial knowledge and understanding of music.

7

Film Music and Form

Of the many criticisms leveled at film music, a major charge is that it lacks cohesive form. Naïve at best, such criticism betrays a total lack of understanding concerning the function of film music and its intimate relationship with other elements of the film. Even a composer as towering as Stravinsky failed to understand this crucial point about film music. When he was hired by Columbia Pictures to do a score for *Commandos Strike at Dawn* Stravinsky, unbeknownst to the producer, proceeded to write some sketches for the picture—without having ever seen the film, which had not been completed at that time. Obviously, the sketches were unusable for that film; Stravinsky later adapted them into what is now known as *The Four Norwegian Moods*.*

A good film composer must be chameleonlike both with his compositional style and, perhaps more importantly, with the form and shape his music takes in relation to the dramatic developments on the screen. It is a cardinal rule for the film composer that the visuals on the screen determine the form of the music written to accompany it. A composer

* Composer David Raksin recalls another case: "When Villa-Lobos was here to do the film *Green Mansions* he told me that he had already finished the music—orchestration and all. (The film was still shooting, but he had written the music without reference to its timings.) After he returned to Brazil, Bronislau Kaper adapted the music to fit the picture."

encounters similar problems when he sets about the task of creating a song from a given text. In this case, the *poet* has already grappled with the problem of form (just as a director has already dealt with the form of a motion picture); for the composer then to impose his own different *musical* form on the poem is asking for confusion, at the very least. Likewise, the film composer must take into consideration the form and rhythm of a scene established by the visuals. To do otherwise is to invite argument not only from the film itself but from the producer and director as well.

This problem of formal continuity between music and picture need not be resolved by having the music merely “ape” the action on the screen (“mickey-mousing”). While “mickey-mousing” is appropriate, even expected, in cartoons, it can be out of place and in poor taste in the dramatic film when it is not handled subtly.

There are, however, some brilliant and imaginative examples of music that take their form from the visual and dramatic structure of a scene. An eloquent example of visual-dramatic-musical formal continuity can be found in a small scene from William Wyler’s film *Carrie*. The composer is David Raksin. At one point in the film, George Hurstwood (Laurence Olivier) has left his wife and his job as the manager of a sophisticated restaurant, and has run off to Chicago with Carrie (Jennifer Jones). Hurstwood learns that the knowledge of his theft of \$10,000 from the owner of the restaurant where he had been employed has caught up with him and he will be unable to gain the kind of high-paying employment he has had in the past. This portion of the scene takes place in the hall of the hotel where he and Carrie are staying. The musical material used for this scene consists of two elements: a slow, plaintive bassoon solo and an elegant waltz tune. The waltz tune is first heard earlier, in the scene where Hurstwood and Carrie first meet in Hurstwood’s restaurant. In the later scene, the waltz music is used primarily to evoke the elegance and sophistication of the restaurant. As the film progresses, however, the little waltz tune takes on dramatic importance and is used to recall those times between Hurstwood and Carrie when their problems did not involve mere survival.

When Hurstwood learns that his theft has been discovered the slow bassoon solo begins, giving the viewer an indication (along with Olivier’s superb acting) of what must be going on inside of Hurstwood at the time. As Hurstwood goes back into the hotel room, he sees Carrie, very

elegantly dressed and obviously very happy, and the slow waltz begins as Hurstwood looks longingly at her. He knows it is the last time they will know such a relatively carefree time. Carrie chatters on about nothing as Hurstwood looks on; this lasts for about 45 seconds. Then Carrie asks, “George, what is it? What’s wrong?” At this point the slow bassoon solo returns, with its plaintive call indicating a return for Hurstwood, and now Carrie, to the reality of their plight. Dramatically the scene is a simple (although subtle) A-B-A form. Raksin structured his music accordingly:

A = solo bassoon, B = waltz tune, and A = solo bassoon.

Another example demonstrating this formal principle is from the film *Joan of Arc*, with a score by Hugo Friedhofer. This music does not have the formal symmetry of the Raksin example since the dramatic structure did not call for it. The music for this sequence can be seen in Figure 1.

On the basis of screen action, this cue is divided into three sections. The first section covers bars 1–19, the second bars 20–33 and the third section bars 34–39. The sections are not related thematically; each has its own melodic material. The sections are, however, unified by texture, style, and the continuity of the action. This scene takes place at the French court, where, in order to test Joan, it has been arranged to have a courtier pose as the Dauphin. Joan senses the deception, and her “voices” lead her to single out the true Dauphin from the crowd of assembled courtiers.

As any musician will realize, the texture of the music is contrapuntal, for the most part. The opening phrase is answered in bar 9 in canon at the octave. In bar 13 the strict imitation is abandoned in order to begin a brief crescendo. In the next bars, as far as bar 20, the materials are still presented in two-part counterpoint and are almost completely derived from what has come before. This process represents a tiny development with fragments being piled atop each other in a more and more compact fashion. This intensification is increased still further by a rise in pitch and by the sudden change in bar 16 to a relatively homophonic structure. Also, the crescendo does not culminate in the expected climax but, rather, uses the device of a negative accent by going to a *subito piano* (suddenly soft). The *subito piano* in bar 20 begins the second section, which is a canon in three parts at the unison for treble voices. These voices in the score represent Joan’s “voices.” The orchestral accompaniment at this point should be regarded as no more than coloristic accompaniment, secondary to the vocal parts. Now ensues the delayed climactic passage, with the alto voices, horns, and trombones swelling into rich harmonies.

Figure 1. Excerpt from *Joan of Arc*, music by Hugo Friedhofer.

The musical score is for an excerpt from *Joan of Arc* by Hugo Friedhofer. It is written for a large ensemble, including vocal soloists and various instrumental groups. The score is divided into several systems, each with multiple staves. The tempo and mood are marked as "Moderato e Mistico". The score includes various musical notations, such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings. The instruments and voices are labeled as follows: Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass, Violins, Violas, Cellos, Double Basses, Flutes, Oboes, Clarinets, Bassoons, Horns, Trumpets, and Tuba. The score is written in G major and 4/4 time. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The tempo is marked as "Moderato e Mistico". The score includes various musical notations, such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings. The instruments and voices are labeled as follows: Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass, Violins, Violas, Cellos, Double Basses, Flutes, Oboes, Clarinets, Bassoons, Horns, Trumpets, and Tuba. The score is written in G major and 4/4 time. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The tempo is marked as "Moderato e Mistico".

This climax is placed approximately in the third quarter of the piece, which, while serving the dramatic needs of the picture, also proves advantageous to the symmetry of the music. The remainder of this cue, from bar 34 on, is a musical and dramatic tapering off from the climax; it ends with a quiet theme in canon at the fifth below.

Of incidental interest is the fact that this cue uses the Dorian mode on G and that it employs a characteristic contrapuntal element of sixteenth-century counterpoint in that the melody never leaps a greater interval than a minor sixth. The range of the melody, however, does go beyond the restricted range of the ninth. The harmonies are also unobtrusive since there is nothing more complex than a triad. The progression of triads in the climactic section are definitely "contemporary" but the listener still perceives the section as predominantly modal in character. This particular sequence, while not the most complex in the score, is one of the most effective.

Thus far we have looked at the relationship between visual/dramatic form and musical form only in the context of individual scenes. What of the entire picture? Is there some sort of cohesive form at work within the picture as a whole, and, if so, should the music reflect this underlying formal structure of the entire film? The answer to both questions is undeniably yes, but with certain qualifications where the music is concerned. Unlike the visuals of a film, which are ever-present and, as a result, have the opportunity for smooth organic growth, music is not one of the ongoing elements of a film. Good film music is used sparingly and only at those moments where it will be most effective. This important dictum of good film music presents a unique formal problem for the composer. Form in absolute music, such as sonata-allegro or rondo, depends a great deal on the principle of repetition and contrast, but repetition and contrast in a relatively short time span and without interruption. With film, on the other hand, there may be long sections with no music at all, in which the audience has plenty of time to forget whatever musical material it may have heard earlier. Knowing this, the film composer has several general formal resources at his disposal to achieve some sort of formal unity in his music.

The first and most common resource is the leitmotiv, which had its flowering in the operas of the nineteenth-century composer Richard Wagner. Film composers picked up on the basic idea of having a different melody or motif for each character in a film. The advantage of the

leitmotiv score is that the musical material is more easily recognizable by the audience. Max Steiner insisted that “every character should have a theme.” The melodies or motifs of a leitmotiv score can be restated in various forms each time the character appears. Alterations in the melody’s character (e.g., sinister, loving, excited) can give the listener some indication of that character’s state of mind at any particular point. This device can become very valuable if the scene itself is emotionally neutral; the music can add something not already present on the screen. While this definition of leitmotiv is an oversimplification, it is not far from the mark. There are, to be sure, many bad examples of the leitmotiv score but there are also many fine examples of the concept being used in a highly subtle and unobtrusive manner. There are films where a motif has been used to express a single, recurring psychological state. One such is the film *The Lost Weekend*, with Ray Milland. The picture, which deals with alcoholism, was scored by Miklos Rozsa. In this score Rozsa makes use of a Theremin, a forerunner of present-day electronic music synthesizers invented by Leon Theremin. It is the sound of the Theremin playing a particular motif (see Figure 2) that helps suggest Ray Milland’s craving for alcohol throughout the film. Neither the instrument nor the melodic material is used at any other time in the film; so when they appear on the sound track, they have a rather stunning dramatic impact. In this instance the sound of the Theremin is in itself part of the motif that suggests a psychological state.

Figure 2. Excerpt from *The Lost Weekend*, music by Miklos Rozsa.



Most composers working with leitmotiv scores tend to treat the melodic material as variations. In other words, a motif varies and develops alongside a character or dramatic situation. Easily one of the finest scores in this category is Hugo Friedhofer’s score for *The Best Years of Our*

Lives. The 1946 film was rather lengthy for its time—it ran 170 minutes—and the score won Friedhofer a well-deserved Academy Award.

The Canadian film composer Louis Applebaum observed that in this film Friedhofer “chose to work on the development, juxtaposition and superimposition of leitmotifs more or less in the Wagnerian tradition. The material itself is definitely not Wagnerian in character, but the manner of its handling derives from the Wagner of the Niebelinger [sic] Ring.” There are only five basic motifs from which Friedhofer draws his material for the rest of the score. Such economy of material is a tribute to Friedhofer’s inventive genius. See chapter 3 for a more complete discussion of Friedhofer’s score.

A second, and much overused formal device, is the monothematic film score, in which a composer uses *only* one tune (usually popular in nature) for an entire score. This compositional device had its classic expression in David Raksin’s score for the Otto Preminger film *Laura*. The subsequent popularity of the haunting song derived from the score (with words by Johnny Mercer), along with the misapplication of the monothematic concept by producers, makes the score an early landmark in the variety of reasons for the slow demise of intelligent and sensitive film music.

In the case of *Laura* the monothematic score works because the film almost *demand*ed such a score. The film deals with a pragmatic, tough detective-type who finds himself slowly falling in love with a girl he believes to be dead. The melody “Laura” has an important dramatic role in the film: for the better part of the film, the music *is* Laura. Film composer Elmer Bernstein touched on this dramatic function of the music when he said, “The film portrayed a man falling in love with a ghost: The mystique was supplied by the insistence of the haunting melody. He [the detective] could not escape it. It was everywhere. . . . We may not remember what Laura was like, but we never forget that she *was* the music.” Never in the course of the film does Raksin use the theme to manufacture love interest between the detective and Laura (who, in the end, is really alive—a case of mistaken identity). Nor does Raksin overuse the theme—an important consideration in the success of the score.

There is a third type of formal structure for film scores; it bears some resemblance to the leitmotiv score and is perhaps best called a *developmental* score. The formal procedure of a developmental score could be loosely compared to the classical sonata-allegro form of the eighteenth-

century but only insofar as developmental procedures are concerned. In many instances the Main Title music in a developmental score serves the function of the exposition in classical sonata-allegro form in that it presents the musical material to be used throughout the score. Here any *structural* resemblance to sonata-allegro ends, there being no definite sequence of formal events in a film score as there is in a sonata-allegro movement. There are altered and unaltered recapitulations of material in a film score but these are decided more by the film's dramatic necessities than by any inherent musical considerations. Among the numerous examples of this type of film score is David Raksin's score to *Forever Amber*. We will use it to demonstrate the kinds of transformations a theme or themes can go through in a score.

Figure 3. *Passacaglia* figure from *Forever Amber*, music by David Raksin.



Figure 3 is the original *passacaglia* idea from which all the other material of the score is derived. Figure 4 shows material derived from the *passacaglia* figure and which proves to be a durable thematic source throughout the score.

The reader should notice the ostinato idea in the bass. This motif is later used as a thematic idea in its own right when it becomes a cantus-firmus of a scherzo sequence.

The little theme shown in Figure 4 becomes, in a new guise, Amber's theme (see Figure 5).

Figure 4. Excerpt from *Forever Amber*.

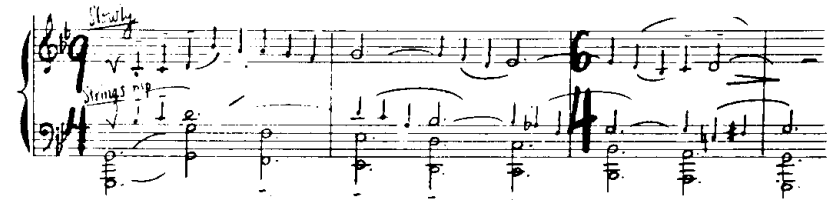


Figure 5. Excerpt from *Forever Amber*.



Figures 6, 7, and 8 show the material in Figure 4 developed into several new short phrases:

Figure 6. Excerpt from *Forever Amber*, music by David Raksin.



Figure 7. Excerpt from *Forever Amber*.

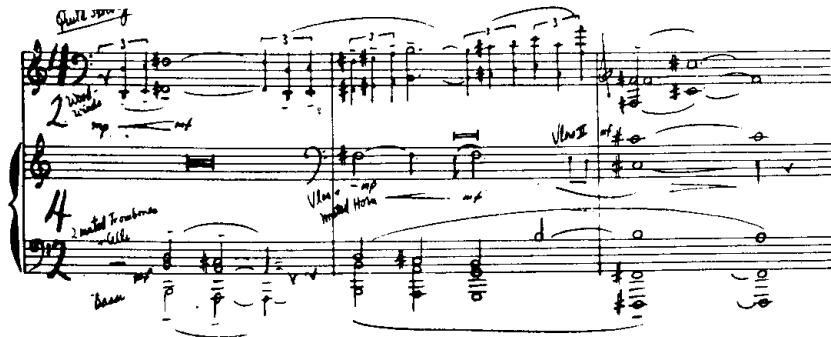


Figure 8. Excerpt from *Forever Amber*.

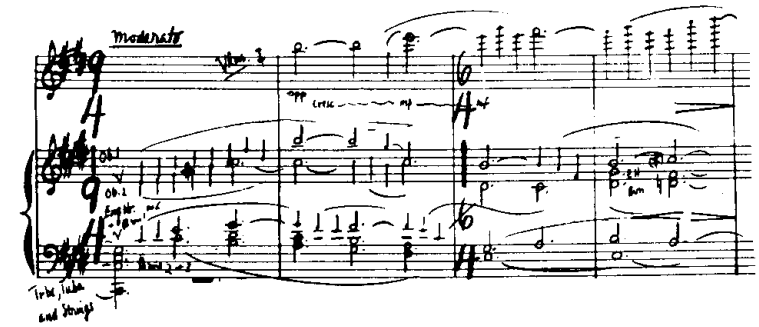
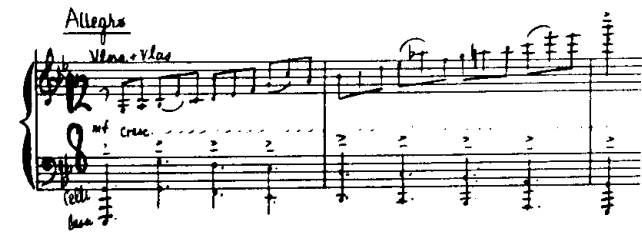


Figure 4 then becomes a fast string passage in a scherzo, with the ostinato in the bass:

Figure 9. Excerpt from *Forever Amber*.



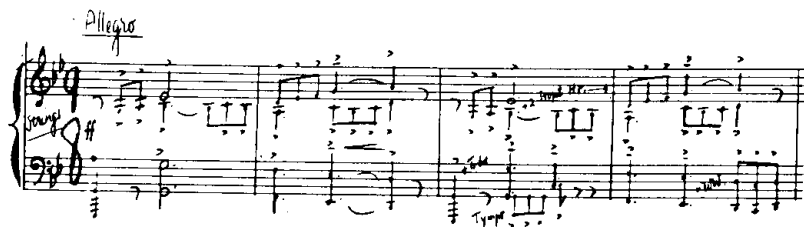
The metamorphosis continues with the last few notes of Figure 9 being used as a rhythmic figure in Figure 10.

Figure 10. Excerpt from *Forever Amber*, music by David Raksin.



The first few notes of Figure 9 then become a new motive found in Figure 11.

Figure 11. Excerpt from *Forever Amber*.



In the course of this scherzo movement the fast string run and the ostinato are simultaneously inverted, as seen in Figure 12.

Figure 12. Excerpt from *Forever Amber*.



Raksin has said of his score to *Forever Amber*: "There are enough canons in this score to start a minor Balkan uprising." One of these canons is developed out of the original material found in Figure 4. The same ostinato in the bass accompanies the canon:

Figure 13. Excerpt from *Forever Amber*.



Figure 14 shows the first three notes of the original theme in transformation into another short melodic phrase.

Figure 14. Excerpt from *Forever Amber*, music by David Raksin.



Figure 15 shows the same three notes from the original theme inverted for use as a climactic figure.

Figure 15. Excerpt from *Forever Amber*.



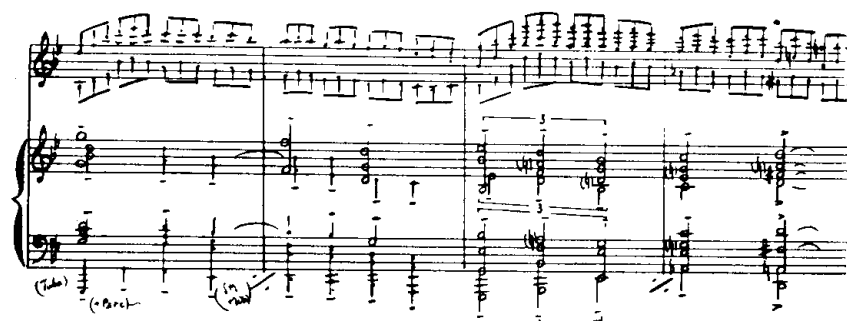
Figures 14 and 15 are then used together to form yet another new phrase, alternately bitter and sympathetic:

Figure 16. Excerpt from *Forever Amber*.



The original theme of Figure 4 becomes, at one point, a chorale, with an elaboration of the ostinato running through it:

Figure 17. Excerpt from *Forever Amber*, music by David Raksin.



Finally, the string passage found in Figure 9, the ostinato of Figure 4, and sundry other material is moved into the key of the relative major in Figure 18.

Figure 18. Excerpt from *Forever Amber*.



Figure 19 contains the material that ends the prologue of the film and that accompanies the beginning of the story. The key is B-flat major at the beginning of this example but, by the end, has shifted back to the original key of Figure 4, G minor. Raksin has humorously dubbed this particular example a *Quasicaglia* because "it managed to avoid being either a *Passacaglia* or a *Basso Ostinato* while combining the worst features of both."

Figure 19. Excerpt from *Forever Amber*.



Raksin's humorous self-criticism is perhaps a little harsh. The metamorphoses of one single theme, as shown in the previous examples, demonstrates a highly fertile imagination as well as a great deal of technical facility.

In closing it should be pointed out that there are instances where composers have the opportunity to apply conventional musical forms to film. One of the more common musical forms to be found in the cinema is the *scherzo*, which is a fast and usually exciting piece of music. This musical form has been used innumerable times in music accompanying chase scenes in films. In fact, the *scherzo* has been used with such frequency that it allowed Burt Bacharach to do something rather imaginative in his otherwise dismal score for *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*. The most effective place musically in the film is a portion that has no music at all. There is a rather lengthy scene where the two heroes (Paul Newman and Robert Redford) are being chased by the law across the plains. Rather than employ the usual *scherzo* at this point—an almost unbreakable tradition in Westerns—Bacharach chose instead to create a kind of negative accentuation by avoiding music altogether.

Another musical form occurs in one of the more famous montage sequences in all of cinema. It is a theme and variations, employed by composer Bernard Herrmann in his brilliant and flamboyant score for the great Orson Welles film, *Citizen Kane*. The famous montage sequence brilliantly shows the dissolution of Kane's marriage to his first wife. It begins with Kane and his young wife very much in love. Herrmann employs a gentle little waltz tune through this first portion, and as the montage proceeds, he writes a variation on the waltz tune for each sequence of the montage, the variations reflecting in mood the change in the relationship between Kane and his wife.

The opportunity for employing strictly musical forms in pictures is a rather rare one for film composers, and when musical forms are used, it should only be in those instances where the scene allows for it or, as in the montage sequence from *Citizen Kane*, the scene almost demands it.

In any attempt to describe what is basically a visual-aural experience through the medium of words, much is lost in the translation. Unlike sonata or rondo form where the listener has certain preconceived formal expectations concerning the music, with film music there cannot be any real formal expectations in the traditional sense of the word simply

because there are none. Each film has a unique form, each scene its unique underlying rhythm, and it is these elements that a sensitive film composer tries to capture in his music.

While it would be possible to cite more examples of visual-dramatic-musical continuity of form, it is enough to alert the reader that form is operating at various levels within a film. Music is most certainly one of them.