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When Music Takes Over in Film

Edited by

Anna K. Windisch · Claus Tieber · Phil Powrie

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Palgrave Studies in Audio-Visual Culture

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The aesthetic union of sound and image has become a cultural dominant. A junction for aesthetics, technology and theorisation, film's relationship with music remains the crucial nexus point of two of the most popular arts and richest cultural industries. Arguably, the most interesting area of culture is the interface of audio and video aspects, and that film is the flagship cultural industry remains the fount and crucible of both industrial developments and critical ideas.

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FOREWORD

Nearly everyone can recognize music, without being able to define it. Music inhabits a register different from all else. Sing to an infant instead of talking to her: her eyes widen, she smiles. In a film, breaking into music, though it preserves that basic magic, can be vastly more complex. Aside from the sheer pleasures of rhythm, melody, recognition, and so forth, an infinitude of meanings results from interactions between music and images, characters, and narrative events. Musical moments can be utopian, as with the baby who senses that your singing is magical, or they can subvert or ironize. As scholars including Amy Herzog, Phil Powrie, and Richard Dyer have defined musical moments in film, certain breakings-into-music—‘when the music takes over’—carry special weight. Musical moments can turn the course of the story, change the film’s fabric from prose to turbocharged poetry, and bring a heady mix of pleasure and meaning to the moment—they put a spell on it.

What occurs in the third and fourth shots of Jim Jarmusch’s *Stranger than Paradise* is, for me, such a moment. A girl (Eszter Balint) has arrived in America, fresh from Hungary. She wears a dark coat and carries a shopping bag and a suitcase. She pauses on the sidewalk, takes out a portable tape recorder, switches it on, and continues walking, to Screamin’ Jay Hawkins’s ‘I Put a Spell on You.’ This early rock ‘n’ roll song, awash in reverb, alcohol, and screaming, accompanies a slow tracking shot that follows the girl through desolate, empty, garbage-strewn Lower Manhattan streets. I delight in the disparate rhythms of the song, the

girl's footsteps, and the gliding camera, and the couldn't-be-more-gaping cultural chasm between the Eastern European immigrant girl and the wild voice of the Black bluesman, her silence and his vocal extravagance. But the moment is also utterly convincing, setting the tone of this minimalist movie about rootlessness and displacement, Americanness (from the outside), and understatedness.

In her essay here, Amy Herzog coins a phrase that certainly applies to musical moments—'cinematic baubles of irrepressible pleasure'. One suspects that each essay in this excellent collection arose from its author's pleasure and fascination. As with other compelling affective phenomena, the impact of musical moments is immediate and striking, while explaining our responses—contingent on sociocultural and historical identification, on genre and narrative expectations, and so forth—requires a lot of analysis and specialized language. Anna K. Windisch, Claus Tieber, and Phil Powrie have included an impressive range of theoretical and analytical perspectives regarding the magical pleasure of musical moments. The resulting book is a bauble of irrepressible pleasure itself, as well as a model for studies of the ways music affects the cinematic experience.

June 2021

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Several of the contributions in this collection were presented at the 2018 conference ‘When the Music Takes Over. Musical Numbers in Film and Television’ (University of Salzburg), which grew out of the research project ‘Musical Numbers in Austrian Silent Cinema 1912–1933’ (FWF P 28111) by Claus Tieber and Anna K. Windisch. We are grateful to the department of art history, musicology, and dance studies at the University of Salzburg and its chair Nils Grosch for their invaluable help in organizing this event. We want to thank all our colleagues who shared their papers with us, especially those whose inspiring contributions could not be included in this book. A selection of keynotes and papers presented at the conference formed the starting point for a more specific approach to musical numbers in cinema, focusing on theory, silent and early sound cinema, and world cinema, for which we were able to find additional contributors. We sincerely thank our commissioning editor Lina Aboujeb from Palgrave for her interest and support of the project, and for her never-ending patience from the start. Thanks also to the anonymous readers of our proposal for their input and suggestions which helped to focus this collection.

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PRAISE FOR *WHEN MUSIC TAKES OVER IN FILM*

“*When Music Takes Over in Film* is a significant addition to the literature of song in film. The scholars in this collection dig deep into musical moments when affect overwhelms the image, revealing new insights into what happens when music is unconstrained by narrative, emotionally unleashed, and powerfully disruptive. Attuned to the ontological, ideological, affective, and political dimensions of such moments, the scholars in this collection bring fresh theoretical perspectives as well as an international scope and interdisciplinary focus. The Introduction crystallizes the core issues involved in the performance of song in film with clarity and vision. Taken collectively, the scholars here offer a thought-provoking revision, a brilliant read on what we thought we knew.”

—Kathryn Kalinak, *Professor, Rhode Island College, USA*

“The editors of this inspiring collection speak of the musical moments that are its focus as offering ‘a kaleidoscope of intensities’, and the phrase could equally apply to the collection itself. Taking off from the very special and cherishable feelings evoked when music and song themselves take off from spoken and acted narrative in film, the collection is wonderfully rich in its range, reaching back to silent and early sound film and on to the most recent works, globally generous and revealing, equally at home with classic as with contemporary theory and astonishing one with its revelation of the joyous and disturbing things musical moments can do.”

—Richard Dyer, *King’s College London*

“This is an eclectic and wide-ranging collection that offers an interesting addition to the field of study. The disciplinary focus is broad, with writers drawing on post-structuralist theory as well as more historicist frameworks for their thinking, and there are some highly original analyses of hitherto marginalised film texts. I particularly like the way Phil Powrie’s useful model of the ‘crystal song’ is developed across the contributing essays alongside the idea of the ‘musical moment’, since both concepts express the way music can pull together, hold in tension, and intensify a film’s meaning and affective power. The essays here will appeal to film scholars and music specialists alike.”

—Estella Tincknell, *Associate Professor, UWE Bristol, UK*

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From Unheard to Meaningful: When Music Takes Over in Film

Anna K. Windisch, Claus Tieber, and Phil Powrie

A cold and grey day in an urban environment, monotony reigns and dictates the mundane lives of the city's inhabitants. A boy wants to express his love for the girl next door. Timidly at first he starts to sing and an orchestral accompaniment slowly rises as the girl joins him in song and they begin to dance. Here the environment changes, the camera begins to 'move along' with the characters and the scenery shifts to vibrant colours. We see the world through the lovers' eyes; we hear their song and feel

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with and for them. Just like the singing and dancing characters in the film, we, the audience, escape our surroundings and for a brief moment we experience ‘what utopia would feel like’ (Dyer 2002: 20).

Scenes similar to this fictitious one are virtually obligatory in the film musical, but they can be found in many films. Song-and-dance scenes have served as constitutive elements of cinema since its early days in the so-called silent period. In a variety of manifestations, they remain central creative components of filmmaking beyond generic categories like the film musical. This edited collection is interested in those moments of a film in which the music takes over, in which ‘unheard melodies’—diegetic song-and-dance, diegetic and non-diegetic songs—become meaningful.

Film music and the film musical are often discussed in terms of their functions in relation to the narrative, their ability to support or heighten meanings of the images while remaining unobtrusive, or with regard to their musical structures. Recently, a new interest in musical numbers has appeared that considers ‘musical moments’ as ‘fluid and malleable expressive form[s]’ (Herzog 2010: 5). Different from much of the existing scholarship on the film musical, these new approaches foreground the affective and political power of such sequences, invoking a new interest in musical numbers that goes beyond formal, narrative or heuristic analyses and interpretations. While the tools and starting points of some of these perspectives may differ, they share a curiosity about the filmic elements that Richard Dyer calls ‘non-representational signs’ (Dyer 2002: 22); in movement and rhythm, in new ways of reading such musical instances, readings that try to get to the essence of these scenes and thus to the essence of cinema.

Revisionist readings of moments in which the music takes over are indebted to Estella Tincknell’s and Ian Conrich’s definition of the musical moment as ‘a particular point of disruption, an isolated musical presence in a non-musical film, which is notable for its potential to disturb the text through its unexpectedness or at times excessiveness’ (Conrich and Tincknell 2006: 2). Importantly, they underline the paradoxical nature of the musical moment, in that it is ‘both a momentarily disruptive force and integral to the overall coherence of the text: it helps to articulate the underlying values or ideas in a new way’ (5). Other scholars have found different terminology for describing comparable phenomena. Claudia Gorbman develops a kind of semiotic phenomenology of the ‘rich song’, analysing the many layers and meanings that musical numbers can

accrue (Gorbman 2018), while Richard Dyer has explored the ‘space of songs in film’ in manifold interpretations (Dyer 2012).

The chapters in this book loosely follow two recent theoretical strands using the work of Gilles Deleuze that build on the idea of the musical moment’s disruptiveness, while exploring different aspects of the relationship between music and film. What both definitions have in common is their focus on the affective qualities of the film-music interplay. Both are interested in what the music is doing with the film (Herzog) and how and why these scenes have such a strong impact on the audience (Powrie).

According to Herzog musical moments occur ‘when music, typically a popular song, inverts the image-sound hierarchy to occupy a dominant position in a filmic work. The movements of the image, and hence the structuring of space and time, are dictated by song’ (Herzog 2010: 7). An audio-visual instant emerges that is no longer subordinated to the narration, that can forge new relations between time and space, and of the boundaries of the human body. Herzog defines the musical moment in terms of its functions and impact, as ‘an inclination toward aesthetic and thematic excessiveness as well as a capacity to interrupt narrative flow’ (Herzog 2010: 8). Herzog’s analysis shares aspects of Tincknell and Conrich’s musical moments, although offering a more narrow and targeted demarcation of such moments by her contextualisation of the phenomenon in the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze. She uses Deleuze’s abstract and often ambiguous terms to propose a new ‘mode of analysis’ that focuses on time and movement, rather than on narrative (Herzog 2010: 2). Herzog describes what the musical moment can do in a film:

[...] the musical moment generates patterns of representational repetition that are, simultaneously and uniquely, open to the interventions of difference. The musical moment is unusual in its capacity to make this tension palpable; it is at once one of the most conservative and the most irreverent filmic phenomena. (Herzog 2010: 8)

Whereas Herzog is keenly interested in the ideological operations of musical moments, Powrie reconfigures Deleuze’s ‘crystal-image’ to focus on the emotional power of music in films. His main criterion for what he calls a ‘crystal-song’ is the impact that these songs have on its audience. It is a moment of intense affect whose intensity overwhelms the visual, taking us into a moment of time out of time. Much like Deleuze’s

crystal-image, the crystal-song focuses temporal layers, bringing together past, present and future, generally at critical narrative moments.

Shifting the scholarly attention from the traditional analysis of music's narrative functions towards issues such as affect, style, visual musicality, ideology, configurations of cinematic time and space, and broader philosophical questions about the ontology of cinema can deepen our understanding of audio-visual cultures in general and stimulate new theoretical and methodological approaches in the field. The analysis of a musical moment is then able to create new insights into the relation of film and music, or more generally in the ontology of film itself.

This edited volume collects contributions that are inspired by this new interest that might lead to a revision of the way we think about music in film. The book is divided into four parts. Part one, *What the Musical Moment Can Do—Theoretical Approaches*, starts with the above-mentioned theoretical reflections by Herzog and Powrie, Part two, *How the Musical Moment was Created—Musical Numbers in Silent and Early Sound Cinema*, discusses the very beginnings of musical numbers in cinema, Part three, *Musical Dis/Placements—Musical Moments in Global Cinema*, focuses on international perspectives and Part four, *From Romance to Dystopia*, opens up the discussion for further research with recent case studies.

* * *

In Part one we explore new ways of thinking through the relationship between music and image. Whereas film music functions mostly to express character or narrative, signalling what we might be supposed to feel or think, the musical moment *impresses*, both in terms of arresting our attention (it stops us short, momentarily) and in terms of affecting us (we feel the arrested moment strongly). The questions we ask in Part one are how and why? How do different configurations of the musical moment come to mean more meaningfully than others?

In different ways, Amy Herzog and Phil Powrie posit the musical moment as a kaleidoscope of intensities whose pull and push at one and the same time fracture the moment in centrifugal heterogeneities while also homogenising the moment in centripetal assemblages. Their analyses show how the musical moment is precarious, made of disjunctions and discontinuities swirling alongside converging aggregations. Herzog and Powrie also extend the reach of the musical moment showing how it can

function almost (but not quite) as a leitmotif (Powrie) scoring the surfaces of a film or can develop as an extended intensity (Herzog) comprising a sequence of moments that functions as a critical interrogation (Herzog) or as a structuring device (Powrie).

Amy Herzog revisits her work on the musical, mobilising Bergson's theory of fabulation and James Tobias's work on the film-diagram to home in on the musical moment's historicity and its interrogation of hegemonic formations. She challenges the idea that the musical moment can only be defined as a punctual event within a larger context by analysing the whole of a music video of a Black funeral, Flying Lotus's 'Never Catch Me'. She also traces a concatenation of musical moments in *Moonlight* (2016), teasing out the way in which their recontextualisations articulate an extended reflection on queerness, masculinity and blackness across and through time. Her analysis takes in the impression (as defined above) of romance, the moment of pure longing between Chiron and Kevin, which punctures space and time as the ordinariness of the diner is transformed by the intense feelings generated by a shared musicalised history. Herzog's third and briefer case study is the meet-cute between Star and Jake in *American Honey* (2016). Jake's energetic dancing to what is otherwise just background muzak, Rhianna's 'We Found Love', transforms the ordinariness and 'no-placeness' of the supermarket as well as the music itself into a privileged site of meaning and feeling.

Phil Powrie extends his previous work on the crystal-song, using Roland Barthes' theorisation of the *punctum* to demonstrate the musical moment's affective intensity. Like Herzog, he also selects *American Honey* as one of his case studies, using the title song to show how Star is excluded from the collective spaces of whiteness and romance. In deliberately choosing the same example as Herzog, Powrie emphasises similarities and differences in the two theoretical approaches.

Powrie's concern is to map the conditions for the intense musical moment that collapses time and space as it overwhelms the narrative. He does so by focusing on another film whose title leads to a major musical moment, *Beautiful Boy* (2018), as well as two other films starring Timothée Chalamet, *Lady Bird* (2017), and *Call Me by Your Name* (2017). His final case study is *La La Land* (2016), and, much like Herzog's analysis of *Moonlight*, he demonstrates how the musical moment can be stretched across the fabric of a film, in this case a 'moment musical', a 'chanson sans paroles' structuring the narrative and articulating dystopian affects that cut through the utopia of the film's song and dance numbers.

The second part of the book, *How the Musical Moment was Created—Musical Numbers in Silent and Early Sound Cinema*, provides a historical foundation for the phenomenon of the musical moment, as the chapters span cinema's early days until the beginning of the sound film. Contrary to the traditional view that a phenomenon like the musical moment or the crystal-song can only be detected in sound cinema, the contributions in this part make clear that the seeds for what became musically determined scenes in films, as discussed in this book, were sown in silent cinema. All three chapters explore forms of musical moments in films made in the 1920s and early 1930s; all three argue and present evidence that the history of the musical moment reaches back beyond the sound barrier.

Dominique Nasta develops the concept of subception that she outlined in her previous work. Nasta analyses musical moments in three films by Belgian director Jacques Feyder. She points out the role that subception plays in these scenes and in the use of (diegetic) music in silent cinema in general. When Feyder's characters hear music, the film-viewing experience becomes more intimate and affective through a process of *imagined hearing*. The musical moment, as Nasta discusses it, creates emotional reactions to the onscreen narrative via music, even when it is imagined.

Complementary to Nasta's cognitivist approach, Claus Tieber deals with musical numbers in silent cinema focusing on Austrian film history. He demonstrates how the silent film adaptation of Oscar Strauss' operetta *A Waltz Dream* functions as an intermediary between the Viennese operetta and the American film musical. Combined with an analysis of the musical numbers in *Seine Hoheit, der Eintänzer* (*His Highness, the Gigolo*, 1927), Tieber further shows how the musical moment is able to destabilise the form and ideological underpinnings of a given film via cinematic abstraction and the visual sublimation of sexuality.

The last chapter in this part brings us from silent to early sound film. Laraine Porter examines musical moments in British film musicals from the transitional period, focusing on the various semantic layers and the different and new functions that musical moments acquired during this phase. Her contribution further highlights how musical performances were used to negotiate gender and class differences, and used as marketing tools for the horizontal integration of the film and music industries.

The book's third and most comprehensive part 'Musical Dis/Placements – Musical Moments in Global Cinema' emphasises the importance of a global perspective, using musical moments as a lens through which to address historical representations of displacement

and the cultural politics of different national cinemas. Which type of musical moments can be found in the cinema of the Global South? Are ‘Western’ theories adequate to discuss this phenomenon? These are some of the questions that the chapters in Part three address in order to deepen the discussion of musical moments in cinema from an international perspective. Since music as a cultural practice is intrinsically embedded in cultural traditions, musical moments constitute powerful affective devices for triggering emotional responses related to questions of identity and belonging. While the case studies in this part are as varied in the films they draw attention to as they are geographically distant, one common thread can still be traced: the interconnected notions of loss and belonging, be it culturally, geographically, historically or ethnically. In this respect, musical moments are turned into sites of political enunciation for expressing both resistance and the desire for belonging.

Rajinder Dudrah’s chapter looks at how musical moments become sites for rethinking the cultural politics and representations of the relationship between the homeland and diaspora. On the one hand, he explores how these moments can raise contradictions and transgressions within dominant ideological tropes and conservative narratives of popular Indian cinema aesthetics. On the other, he seizes the ubiquity and significance of musical numbers in Bollywood cinema to trace the affective possibilities of representing the homeland and diaspora relationship through musical moments. In films of the 2000s and onwards, Dudrah detects a shift a tension between this relationship and a tendency to subvert traditional values. In *Dehli 6* (2009), the filmmakers chose open and fluid ‘non-spaces’ to represent the protagonist’s complex cosmopolitan journey in a meditative and non-linear way. In line with the long history of Bollywood musical numbers being extracted from their cinematic diegesis, recent examples point to a new form of appropriating these musical moments for diasporic club spaces.

Junko Yamazaki looks at two post-war Japanese films, *Fragrance of the Night* (1949) and *Passion without End* (1951), in order to re-examine historical conceptions of Japanese post-war cinema through the interrogation of the wartime melodies used in these films. Her foregrounding of the intermedial and intertextual connections in the film’s musical moments offers a layered understanding of how early post-war Japanese cinema audiences navigated a radically changed socio-political environment. Of particular interest in her study is the relationship that is forged between the protagonists and time, or history, through the use of

songs from the country's colonial past. Drawing on Bernhard Hoeckner's work on film music and memory, Yamazaki shows how in both films, any redemption for society's past failures and the attempts of forging belonging in a new and bright post-war Japanese reality are suspended and 'cast shadows into the future'.

Yifen Beus's chapter analyses two African films—Joseph Gai Ramaka's *Karmen Gei* (2001) and Flora Gomes' *Nha Fala* (2002)—that use the film musical's generic conventions to integrate traditional and hybridised musical practices of the indigenous storyteller practice (*griot/griotte*), in order to endow the films' female protagonists with agency and progressive political messages for Africa's future. Beus defines the heroine's musical numbers as 'redemption songs', which through their affective and transformative power redeem the protagonists, if not literally, then metaphorically from subjugation in stereotypical narratives as well as from socio-economic and cultural forms of domination. While Ramaka's *Karmen* adheres to the basic structures of the *Carmen* archetype, she is used as a reflexive trope for representing resistance to Western cultural neo-colonialism, as well as the liberation of *Karmen's*/the continent's voice, symbolising Africa's postcolonial liberty and independence. As an intertextual cinematic refrain, *Karmen's* repeated rendition of the 'Habanera' can be understood as a 'crystal-song' that liberates *Karmen* and localises the cultural identity of the film through indigenous music, dance and language. *Nha Fala*, the musical comedy-satire by Bissau-Guinean director Flora Gomes, adheres more closely to the Hollywood format. The protagonist, Vita, is made to believe that she is cursed and will die if she sings. Vita's muted voice becomes the allegorical voice of the various ethnic groups and nations of the African continent, silenced by postcolonial oppression. In a carnivalesque juxtaposition of death and resurrection, the staged, Christ-like funeral procession in the film's final musical moment overthrows the superstition, mental slavery and internalised oppressive values, resurrecting Vita's/the African nations' voice and life force through song and dance.

Jacqueline Avila discusses Luis Estrada's *El Infierno* (2010), a dark Mexican comedy and political satire dealing with organised crime, displacement and moral decay within the narcoculture. Benjamin García, 'Benny', who has spent 20 years in the USA, is deported back to Mexico and quickly becomes enmeshed in the violent drug cartel that wreaks havoc on his home town. While the film's soundtrack is crucial to localising the soundscape of the 'narcoculture' narrative, it is to a large extent

through the humorous use of music that the film obscures both the socio-political commentary and the severity of the country's situation. Avila points to the role of musical moments—two songs and their lyrics are of particular interest in this regard—in rendering the most brutal scenes caricatural and absurd. While important to understanding Benny's conflicted and fractured sense of identity, both songs act anempathetically by invoking irony and sarcasm.

Part four, *From Romance to Dystopia*, focuses on the performance of diegetic songs. These, as our opening paragraph suggested, are a means of bringing characters together in shared musical moments. But the musical moment is not always about 'what utopia would feel like' (Dyer 2002: 20). What might seem like a shared musical moment can become a moment of crisis where the characters share only mutual incomprehension, as the musical moment fractures notions of togetherness, opening out onto dystopia.

Katja Hettich explores the function of diegetic songs in scenes of romance so as to establish a typology of musical moments as a 'genre microscripts', to reprise Greg Smith's terminology, which modify genre expectations. Her typology includes examples of professional stage performances, intimate performances of characters composing music or singing to each other, public confession songs, which can often fall into Claudia Gorbman's category of 'artless singing', and finally, joint listening to a recording.

Rhiannon Harries's case study—Ines's amateurish performance of 'The Greatest Love of All' in *Toni Erdmann* (2016)—addresses what might be called the crisis of utopia. Using Bergson and Sianne Ngai on comedy as well as Lauren Berlant's notion of the 'impasse', Harries picks up the idea of a more dystopian musical moment, showing how both father and daughter are out of joint, although in different ways. The father is a neo-situationist prankster ill at ease with the corporate world of his daughter. She is a robotic and joyless functionary. Their performance of the song made famous by Whitney Houston in *Bodyguard* (1992) appears to bring them together in a utopian moment, but at the same time it fractures their relationship to each other and to historical time, making the kind of authenticity sought by the father unattainable in the context of late capitalist society.

* * *

In her essay on Bergson, Dorothea Olkowski writes that ‘when perception is attentive every perception becomes an act of creation in which the perception opens as many circuits as there are memory images attracted by this new perception, making of every perception a qualitative multiplicity’ (1999: 114; cited in Herzog 2010: 26). The musical moments addressed in this collection show how each musical moment exemplifies this multiplicity, opening up archaeological layers of space and time, allowing perception, as Olkowski says, citing Bergson, to become a ‘deeper stratum of reality’ (114). The musical moments explored in this collection locate, in the sense of anchoring, multiple specificities while also at the same time dislocating and disrupting the film so that we can hear what we see and see what we hear when the music takes over.

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PART I

What The Musical Moment Can
Do—Theoretical Approaches



CHAPTER 2

Dark Times: Fabulation, Synchrony, and the Musical Moment Reprised

Amy Herzog

Musical films, those cinematic baubles of irrepressible pleasure, have curiously and consistently arisen from dark historical times. At the moment I am writing in 2021, in the midst of a global pandemic, in the wake of four years of a Trump administration in the United States, with right-wing nationalist movements on the rise across the world, this coincidence feels especially poignant. How can we understand the relationship between musical films and history beyond the classical studio era, and beyond the lens of nostalgia? How do musical moments in film speak to the conditions of their time, and how do they speak across time? Perhaps more pointedly, how do the conditions of our own dark times demand new kinds of musical moments and new modes of reading them?

Musical moments in moving-image media are dynamic, shifting in nature between format, genre, and historical period, lacking fidelity to generic taxonomies or strict formal constraints. An expansive and inclusive

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formulation of the musical moment—instances when music ‘takes over’ the organising logic of a scene—allows us to locate these moments within and outside the musical genre, and to find echoes of more traditional film musical numbers in surprising places (in pornography, or line dancing, or fitness videos, or flash mobs). At the same time, this inclusive approach creates a host of new problems, as music can ‘take over’ in myriad ways, and it can become challenging to make meaningful sense out of the work an individual musical moment performs. My project in this chapter is to revisit the ways that I initially attempted to navigate this problem in my 2010 book on musicals and then reflect on how we might deepen our understanding of musical moments by way of three more contemporary case studies.

The genesis of my study of musical moments was an ongoing fascination with the ways in which film musical numbers functioned in film, in terms of their affective reconfigurations of time and space, and on their curious historical and industrial positioning (Herzog 2010). Despite their variations, musical moments are marked by certain common formal tendencies: narrative rupture, spectacular stagings and irrational cuts, impossible movements, formulaic scenarios, and hackneyed characters. They often served as cracked mirrors, reflecting the material conditions of their historical moments, at the same time that they gestured towards futurity, something better, something more.

While there is a rich body of scholarship on musical films, the existing literature tended to focus on identifying generic characteristics, mapping ideological tendencies, and creating taxonomies of film musical categories. But aside from Richard Dyer’s work, very little attention had been paid to what musical moments *feel* like, and to critically examining these affective circuits as material, as politically relevant, and as historically contingent.¹ At the same time, I was influenced by emerging work on race and musicals, and provocative industry studies that detailed the economic and structural conditions that gave rise to very different kinds of musical moments.² I am particularly indebted to Arthur Knight’s work on Black performance and the work of Matthew Tinkcom and Steven Cohan on camp, capital, and the centrality of queer labour in the production of studio era musicals. I was grappling for strategies for theorising musicals that could take into account both the historical and political richness of the texts themselves, as ‘incongruous’ commercial products, and the affective potentialities they set into motion in the event of reception. I was further fascinated with the ways that these ‘potentialities’ embodied

in musical moments themselves transform, sometimes dramatically, as the films circulate over time, and in new contexts with new audiences.

What I proposed, then, was to ask not what musical moments *are*, but rather, what is it that musical moments *do*.

Musical moments create realms of auditory and visual experimentation geared toward eliciting pleasurable sensory responses. Much of what the musical moment does, then, is registered within the affective responses of the audience. Musical moments are marked by a tendency to restructure spatiotemporal coordinates, to reconfigure the boundaries and operations of the human body, and to forge new relations between organic and inorganic elements within the frame. [...] In effect, the musical moment generates patterns of representational repetition that are, simultaneously and uniquely, open to the interventions of difference. The musical moment is unusual in its capacity to make this tension palpable; it is at once one of the most conservative and the most irreverent filmic phenomena. (Herzog 2010: 8)

There were two philosophical concepts that I found especially helpful in contending with these contradictory qualities. The first is that of fabulation, as theorised by Henri Bergson. Fabulation, for Bergson, is a ‘voluntary hallucination’ that emerges from a moment of shock, circumventing reason such that an individual creates a fiction, a fabulation that carves out elements of the real, often from trauma, but then illuminates and reanimates those elements in a speculative way, writing the individual into the order of the collective. As taken up by Deleuze and Guattari, fabulation becomes a more explicitly political tool core to their idea of a minor literature. ‘Through fabulation, those who are marginalised can invent themselves, they can illuminate and mutate the [...] forces that oppress them’ (Herzog 2010: 132). As D. N. Rodowick writes,

[Fabulation] is neither a psychological memory where the individual recalls a repressed history, nor simply a historical memory as the representation of the occluded story of a people. Rather, it entails a serialism that transforms the individual at the same time as the collective. This double-becoming intertwines two discursive series in a free indirect relation: communication between the world and the I in a fragmented world, and communication of the world and the I in a fragmented I, which must find common points of articulation. (Rodowick 1997: 159–160)

The key points to take away here are that fabulation is not the mere reflection or recuperation of a forgotten history, now re-presented. It is a speculative, serial mode of fiction that excavates and riffs on the past, utilising multiple points of mutually transformative narration.

The second concept here is slightly more amorphous, but it has to do with that of cinema, or commercial media more broadly, as a kind of historical image. We can think here of Kracauer's description of Busby Berkelyesque 'girl-clusters' in the 'Mass Ornament' as the capitalist, fractured prism through which we can glimpse the rationale of a fractured historical moment:

The position that an epoch occupies in the historical process can be determined more strikingly from an analysis of its inconspicuous surface-level expressions than from that epoch's judgments about itself [...] The surface-level expressions [...] by virtue of their unconscious nature, provide unmediated access to the fundamental substance of the state of things. (Kracauer 1995: 75)

It seems fitting that some of the most enduring early theories of media spectatorship evolved alongside and even directly through the musical film. I return, again and again, to Kracauer and Walter Benjamin's descriptions of those entrancing, mass-produced prisms that contain the virtual shock to thought for the distracted masses. The refrain is familiar, but at the same time not yet fully realised, I would argue, in terms of our understanding of historical images as potentialities, events activated through acts of critical engagement. For Nietzsche, art can work in concert with genealogical history to critically excavate and to create something new from its interventions with the past:

If the value of a drama lay solely in its conclusion, the drama itself would be merely the most wearisome and indirect way possible of reaching this goal; and so I hope that the significance of history will not be thought to lie in its general propositions [...] but that its value will be seen to consist in its taking a familiar, perhaps commonplace theme, an everyday melody, and composing inspired variations on it, enhancing it, elevating it to a comprehensive symbol, and thus disclosing in the original theme a whole world of profundity, power, and beauty. (Nietzsche 1997: 92–93)

Musical moving images, I would argue, are particularly primed for transformative, historically illuminating reading practices. Through their

rehearsals of refrains, they introduce difference, animating time and space, and by extension, animating those that engage with them, to forge non-linear constellations that would not otherwise be perceptible.

James Tobias, in his book *Sync*, approaches questions of musicality and gesture in film, wondering why they are so often ‘deployed for emphasizing the synchronization not simply of sound and image streams but of historical and contemporized time’ (Tobias 2010: 10). Tobias is interested in the ways in which films such as *Metropolis* (1927) use gesture and rhythm not to ‘tell’ time, but to diagram temporal and affective relations from their historical period. In concert with the film-diagram, he writes, we, the spectators, ‘diagram some relation between its complex temporalities and our own in receiving it’ (Tobias 2010: 4). The moving image, as such, becomes a hieroglyph through the process of being perceived. Cinema and other streaming technologies, he argues, are ‘queer clocks: devices that diagram, express, and interpret unfamiliar temporal relations [...] Though it cannot accurately represent time and space because it helps displace them, cinema begins with a synchronisation of reception and production as exhibition, where historicity and contemporaneity are diagrammed via affective means that audiences feel’ (Tobias 2010: 1, 8).

In describing works that critically intervene in oppressive representational blockages, Tobias describes these interventions in ways that resonate with my understanding of fabulation, art, and historical genealogy:

Across a wide range of media theories and practices of audiovisual media, a musical turn has been deployed where a crisis in representation becomes irremediable or irredeemable. [...] The musical turn consists in relating the time of media reception to historical temporality, the potentiality of the monad to the potentiality of the dialectic, to configure work, text, subjectivity, corporeality, conduct, national or transnational body politics [...] as a return of affective labor through the screen that otherwise closes off the subject from historical experience. (Tobias 2010: 217)

I am struck by three key points here in understanding the relationship between musical media and historical time: first, the notion of the moving image not as a text, but as a temporal diagram that connects at least two moments: the time of production and the time of activation via reception and reading; second, that each of these moments (production and reading) is marked by a particular form of affective labour; and third,

that musicality, in both moments, has the potential to resist representational blockages by animating time, and putting into motion discursive relationships between the singular and the collective.

Phil Powrie's theorisation of the 'crystal-song' in music-driven films arrives at a strikingly similar understanding of musicality, history, and time. Also borrowing from Deleuze, Powrie identifies, within musical moments, a cross-temporal movement that is at once grounding, embodied, and transcendent:

The crystal-song [...] binds us to our embodied selves, the *socius*, and the moment in a transcendent and haptic flight towards the sublime. It reconciles us to the present moment in its inevitable ungraspability, as the present shifts from present passed, as the sublime transports us to a different place and a different feeling. (2017: 27)

Much like a voluntary hallucination, a shock to thought, or the film-music-diagram, the crystal-song is a concentrated moment of perception and transformation, via which the present-moment coalesces through the materiality of the individual and the collective, activating affective shift that carries with it the potential for seeing, feeling, and thinking differently. This is not merely a rupture but a temporal prism, rooted in the material conditions of the 'now' of production, the 'now' of perception, and the future that it imagines.

If we think about the musical moment as a crystal-song or a 'queer clock' that diagrams constellations of different temporal presents, some of the iterations that speak most directly to our own current conditions are extended music videos and long-form 'visual albums' by artists like Beyoncé, Frank Ocean, Childish Gambino, and Janelle Monáe. I am especially haunted by Hiro Murai's 2014 music video for Flying Lotus and Kendrick Lamar's 'Never Catch Me'.³

The video begins with a slow dolly out from a window hazed in gauze curtains and partially shuttered venetian blinds, revealing a shiny wooden coffin atop a gurney. Preliminary keyboard chords hum as the camera pulls back in the hushed space of the darkened funeral home, joined by a bass guitar warming up as it shifts axes to a lateral move down a hallway, past empty carpeted rooms of mourning. Jewel-like vibraphone tones hover over a low-pitched, ominous hum, like an industrial fan, that swells and synchronises with the green flickering of fluorescent wall sconce. Through a matching cut, the camera continues down a church aisle where

a funeral is in progress; a simple piano melody marks this move and is soon joined by dizzying jazz- and prog rock-inflected rhythmic, bass, and vocal tracks. The rich musical textures find a visual analogue in the haptic fabrics, faces, and hunched shoulders of the mourners settling into their grief. We realise that we are entering the space of a Black funeral, a funeral for two young children.

The camera floats, grazing over the pews, the grieving families, the stuffed animals and memorial photos, the children's folded hands at a steady remove, until its movement is punctured by the eyes of the dead boy snapping open on the beat. He and the dead girl beside him rise from their open caskets in unison. What follows is a polyphony of cascading synchronous movements, each following a different line in Flying Lotus's intricate composition. The children's bodies move with angular schizoid exuberance along with Lamar's rapid-fire lyrics, intercut by the half-time flicks of a mourning woman's fan. The hands of the choir ghost the claps on the track, pulling them to the surface of the mix. And after the vocals break, the children's limbs are taken over by the percussive improvisation of the bass solo before slowing and floating from the room, and as the video unfolds, into the sunshine and wind. Never Gonna Catch Me.

Murai's visualisation of this track is almost unbearably affecting, offering up an unblinking image of Black grief, the refrain of untimely death that is as familiar as it is shocking, but animated by life, embodied in the young dancers (Will Simmons and Angel Gibbs) and their unbri-dled joy in feeling moved by music (see Fig. 2.1). With gratitude to Michael Gillespie's *Film Blackness*, I would argue that this evocation of a very specific, very material image of death cannot be reduced to that index of 'the real' so insistently and oppressively imposed on Black bodies. Instead, this crystalline musical image provides the foundation for a discursive, collaborative, and collective improvisation (by Flying Lotus, Murai, Lamar and bassist Thundercat, alongside choreographers Keone and Mari and dancers Simmons and Gibbs) that destabilises the indexical function of that image, and puts it in dialogue, musically, with a host of artistic and philosophical threads (jazz historiography, psychedelia, and fusion rock, the broader relationship between art and death). The immersive materiality of both the haptic images (the fabrics, wood, lace, and skin) and the musical tracks are rooted in their Black specificity and their shared Black audiovisual culture. This constellation, constantly shifting between individuality and the collective, is forged through those moments of fleeting synchrony. The shock of the unexpected moments



Fig. 2.1 The young dancers of ‘Never Catch Me’ (*Courtesy* Doomsday Entertainment)

of sync punctuates the flow, stuttering, and in that moment of pleasure, a speculative, crystalline opening emerges.

In effect, rhythm, synchrony, and seriality function in this video as transformative vehicles. Familiar imagery, burdened with a representational history, becomes animated and recomposed. The song is not merely illustrated by the image, but instead sound and image function prismatically, illuminating and improvising on each other’s representational strategies. Such exquisite moments of crystallisation, of course, do not occur consistently, or even frequently, in musical production numbers. Much like Deleuze’s movement- and time-images, we might view musical moments along a continuum, with some verging towards staid, measured articulations of time, and others taking flight towards more complex spatiotemporal constructions. Those more temporally fluid musical moments, like the Murai video, tend to incorporate a doubling of time and concentration, rooting backwards into the materiality of the

present and the virtual history that lies embedded within it, and engaging in acts of improvisatory fabulation, speculative leaps into the future.

Visual synchrony, spatial animation, and contrapuntal audiovisual layering are strategies deployed in contemporary music videos, where these practices have evolved to define the format. In a number of recent narrative feature films, however (namely those not identified as neo-musical genre films), more subdued musical moments arise, seemingly unmotivated, in unexpected places. While often formally linked to classical musical conventions, such as the integrated number where characters burst into song, these more recent iterations capitalise on their surprise arrivals to generate affect (as their audiences are not anticipating these temporary shifts in generic convention). All the while, the imagery, staging, and soundscapes for these narrative-based musical moments tend to remain deeply grounded in the banality of realistic settings.

In the opening scene of Andrea Arnold's 2016 film *American Honey*, Star (Sasha Lane), who had been searching a parking lot dumpster for salvageable food with two children, follows a van full of exuberant and dirty young people into a Kmart discount store. This fragment, one of a long string of musical moments that structure the film, roots itself in Rhianna's 'We Found Love' playing on the box store sound system. The ringleader of the van crew, Jake (Shia LeBeouf) catches Star's gaze as she watches him from across the store, points at himself, and the two begin a distanced flirtation. Initially muddled by the ambient sound of the checkout line, the moment becomes musical as Jake, now on the far side of the checkout counter, begins nodding his head to the beat and his band of miscreants form a vocal rave circle. With this visual synchronisation, the wasteland of the box store springs to life. Jake leaps onto the bagging counter to dance, a spontaneous seduction that sinks its hook. Jake, fully aware of his hold on Star's (and our) attention, locks eyes with her (and us, the camera) through this entire performance, even as the checkout worker radios for security.

A complex bait-and-switch takes place here, as we and Star are simultaneously seduced by Jake's sales pitch (like countless audiences and starlets before us), even though we rightly suspect this song and dance is not only a knowing act, but in fact part of Jake's job. Indeed, this musical moment opens, like a Russian doll, into nested performances of affective paid labour. Jake is the recruiter and trainer for a nomad door-to-door magazine sales crew, a dubious business powered by otherwise homeless youth, and Star is his newest target. She seems aware that this is a

pitch, however, and the benefits (freedom, comradeship) are worth both the risks, and the work (indentured servitude, her own performed pitches). As an audience, we are also acutely aware of Shia LeBeouf's frustratingly effective work here as an actor, rendered sour by the resonances between his character and recent revelations about his real-life abusive behaviour. Amongst the intrusions of the real within this scene is another worker, the clenched-jawed store cop, an analogue, perhaps, to the rain-sodden police officer in *Singin' in the Rain* (1952), he himself only a thin blue-light special away from the disaffected youth he casts into the parking lot, ushering the number to a close. Arnold's musical intervention in the film functions on multiple registers. It gestures towards the historical legacy of the integrated number as meet-cute, rendered both poignant and ironic in this unromantic setting. Through our own affective responses to the triggers of Rhianna's infectious tune and to the thrilling surprise of synchronised movements, we feel Star's pleasure and surrender. But the brutality of her real world always remains palpable, present through the *mise en scène* and the soundscape. In its relentless attention to the underbelly of the gig economy, a voluntary hallucination of late-capitalist rural poverty, *American Honey*, resolutely refuses condescension, tapping instead into rhythms, breaks, and silences of that world to find connection, or as Rhianna suggests, love in a hopeless place.

Despite its association with nostalgia, escapism, and social conservatism, the musical moment, then, has the potential to generate genuine political insights. Contemporary experiments with the form, particularly those that put music in dialogue with the material realities of race and capitalism, are expanding our understanding of the work that the musical moment can perform. I would argue that Barry Jenkin's *Moonlight* (2016) is one of the most complex iterations of this potential. *Moonlight* is a film that in many ways functions as an extended series of musical moments, a symphonic layering of temporal references and rhythmic variations. Here, the three-act portrait of an evolving young man is realised by the absorption of image in sound, followed by subsequent waves of near silence, weaving together complex allusions and links between seemingly disparate trains of thought and points in time.

One key musical sequence opens to the strains of Brazilian musician and activist Caetano Veloso's version of 'Cucurrucucú paloma' as the protagonist, Black (Trevante Rhodes), begins a drive from Atlanta to Miami. Chiron is en route to see a man, Kevin (André Holland), whom

he has not spoken to since childhood, whom he loved, and who betrayed him, setting both their lives careening on disparate trajectories.⁴

The scene begins with a point of view shot of the open, sunlit highway stretching to the horizon, vertical street lamps providing a visual rhythmic measure as they pass. As Veloso's voice gently joins the sparse acoustic orchestration, the camera pivots to the left, gliding over the dashboard to frame Chiron in profile, contemplating the road, bathed in soft light. The camera cuts to a floating shot above and behind Chiron's 1978 Oldsmobile Cutlass Supreme as it glides down the nearly empty highway. Just as Veloso intones the soaring 'ay, ay, ay, ay, ay' of the chorus, through a slow dissolve, the highway merges with and is replaced by a night-time image and soft sounds of Black children playing in the surf (it is unclear if this is a memory image from his own childhood, or a scene of arrival back home). In another axis shift, the camera pans slowly upward from the water, following Veloso's voice to linger on the full moon in the deep blue Miami sky.

'Cucurrucucú paloma' has a storied cinematic history, first rendered in its original Mexican *huapango* style in the 1955 film *Escuela de vagabundos* (*School for Tramps*), and later performed with gusto by Lola Beltrán and the Mariachi Pulido as the title track for her 1965 film. Veloso's rendition, however, strips the melody of the traditional huapango de mariachi group accompaniment, slows its tempo, lingering over the onomatopoeic cooing of the dove, which serves in lyrics of the song as a vehicle for a lovelorn soul. Veloso most famously performed the song live in Pedro Almodóvar's *Hable con ella* (*Talk to Her*, 2002), but Jenkins pays homage more directly in *Moonlight* to the appearance of Veloso's recording in Wong Kar-Wai's 1997 film *Happy Together*. *Happy Together* is a fragmented, brutal portrait of the dissolution of a romantic relationship between two men from Hong Kong, who travel to Argentina, on a quest to find a waterfall and salvage their love. There, too, Veloso's live recording accompanies a road trip laden with promise and queer longing.

This web of layered quotations and slowed tempos is core to Jenkins's craft. Jenkins speaks about the Veloso track at length in an interview with *Pitchfork* magazine. When asked if he was referencing Almodóvar by including the track, Jenkins answered:

It's more on purpose that it's the same song used in Wong Kar-wai's *Happy Together*. It's a direct homage. [...] *Moonlight* is worlds away from *Happy Together*—it's a movie about two Asian men living in Argentina, and here

we have these two black men from fucking Liberty City, Miami. The world is very big and also very small, because they're experiencing the same things. [...] [H]opefully it will introduce a certain audience that has been going to see this film but who has maybe never heard Caetano Veloso—the same way that when I watched *Happy Together*, I got to Asia by way of Argentina and discovered Caetano Veloso. There's also a hard cut out of it to fucking 'Classic Man'—the Caetano is very soft and cool, the Jidenna comes in hard as fuck. Because again, the worlds clash. (Schnipper 2016)

Veloso's song performs an enormous amount of labour here. As the primary expressive force in a study of a character who rarely speaks, the song here works to grant us access to Chiron's continuously shifting consciousness, at the same time that it opens outward, outside the character, outside the film. This kind of dual movement informs Michael Gillespie's theorisation of film blackness, which points to the ways in which blackness on film exists as both material and immaterial, 'a free-floating trace unmoored from individual subjects' and as a 'concrete index of power' (Gillespie 2016: 157, quoting Huey Copeland); Gillespie posits film blackness not as a category, but an assemblage of multidirectional strategies, including 'discourse, sedimentations, and modalities' (Gillespie 2016: 157) as well as 'interpretive and creative' processes—critical modes of art making and spectatorship (Gillespie 2016: 5–6).

Suddenly those otherwise over-determined signifiers of Black masculinity, the muscles and the car and the gold fronts, through this tender temporal mapping and untangling, emerge as signs of intense vulnerability, as armour against trauma, as homage and anchor to lost or broken parental figures, launching the spectator into her own journey of mapping and untangling. In much the same way, Veloso's song becomes the discursive vector that maps Chiron's desire (and, it seems, Jenkins's personal history) onto all these various historical outpourings of longing this same song has borne (indeed, this might be the thing that the musical moment does best). This series of nesting sites of articulation and interpretation strikes me as very similar to the notion of a temporal diagram. Or to put this in different terms, 'this double-becoming intertwines two discursive series in a free indirect relation: communication between the world and the I in a fragmented world, and communication of the world and the I in a fragmented I, which have found a common point of musical articulation' (Rodowick 1997: 159).

This sequence also exists, as Jenkins suggests, to set up a cut that is hard as fuck, jumping from the soft cool tones of the ‘Cucurru-cucú paloma’ into a chopped and screwed version of Jidenna’s ‘Classic Man’. Chopping and screwing is the 1990s, Houston, TX-based style of remixing, pioneered by DJ Screw. The technique involves cutting fragments of existing popular songs, slowing them down, shifting the pitch, and performing other sonic manipulations (skipping beats, looping, or creating crossfade delays). Thus a fairly light-hearted song such as ‘Classic Man’ takes on a darker resonance on the soundtrack where it is slowed, deepened, and weighted. Jidenna’s original sartorial boast, rendered here hard as fuck, is suddenly haunted by its own aspirational assertion, opening into a paradoxical space of vulnerability. What does it mean to claim, with such insistence, and with such accumulated anguish, to be a ‘classic man’?

Chopping and screwing, for Barry Jenkins,

makes hip-hop almost hypermasculine, but it opens up all this yearning in the lyrics. Hip-hop is usually moving at such a high bpm that you don’t catch that not only is this poetry, but it’s really pained [...] If you chop and screw it, you allow all of that pain to come through. (Zaman and Rapold 2016)

‘When you slow things down’, Jenkins recounted in an interview, ‘there’s this emotion, this yearning’ (Schnipper 2016). Composer Nick Britell embraced the practice of chopping and screwing, which is deployed throughout the soundtrack, including the score. Britell’s own original themes, each linked to a stage in Little/Chiron/Black’s life, are versions of his first childhood theme, extensively slowed down, re-pitched, and sometimes re-orchestrated and slowed even further, resurfacing each time in a new key, transformed.⁵

The deployment of pre-existing music within this soundtrack furthers this project of recontextualisation, where familiar refrains become defamiliarised, disclosing previously unheard qualities, and teasing out from the image new sets of affective relations. In an exquisite sequence, the ‘Laudate Dominum’ from Mozart’s ‘Vesperae Solennes de Confessore’ accompanies a group of young boys playing ball and wrestling in a sun-drenched field. The orchestration is at once transcendent and rooted in the now, startlingly punctured by the blare of a passing train and the laughter of the children. The bodies of the boys, their makeshift paper

ball, the birds swooping overhead, are animated and rendered operatic as they gather and separate in time. Here, as across film as a whole, the audiovisual refrain extends into contemplative spaces, reaching at once backwards into individual and collective memories, and forward, as they mutate and take flight, always changing, always moving.

Returning to the musical sequence that unfolds from the ‘Cucurrucucú paloma’/‘Classic Man’ transition, that brash cut takes place in a diner parking lot where Black is disembarking from his car, the chopped and screwed Jidenna blaring from the Cutlass’s speakers. He abruptly shuts off the stereo, and we are immersed in the ambient sounds of the empty parking lot, the hiss of passing cars on wet pavement, the rustling to Black’s movements as he pulls on a shirt, adjusts his chain, grooms his hair. The traffic noise rises in the mix to match our suspense as the camera follows Black closely from behind, and he reaches for the door of the diner.

All ambient noise abruptly drops out, and the image cuts to a closeup of a small gold bell that rings to mark our arrival, and we are conveyed, via Aretha Franklin’s ‘One Step Ahead’, into the nostalgia-infused world of the diner, which, with its leatherette booths and wood panelling, feels transported straight from 1965. Black slides onto a counter stool, and we gaze over his broad shoulders as he waits, the camera pivoting to reveal Kevin, who has not yet recognised him, waiting on customers, then panning back to Black’s face, eyes turned downward, panning back to Kevin as he approaches with a coffee pot, then back to Black, still unable to look up. Franklin’s restrained performance, and the heartbreak of the lyrics push the romantic anticipation to a breaking point:

One step is all I have to take
 Backwards, to be the same old fool for you
 I used to be
 I’m only one step ahead of your arms
 One kiss away from your sweet lips
 I know I can’t afford to stop for one moment

Kevin’s face fills the frame at the moment of recognition, his soft eyes wide (see Fig. 2.2). The sound de-links itself from the image, Kevin’s lips remain still while we hear his voice: ‘Chiron?’ The image cuts to Black, returning his look. Time stops.

The affect here overwhelms the circuits of the image, which falls out of sync. The coincidence of memory, melody, and connection cause time



Fig. 2.2 Kevin recognises Black (*Courtesy* Altitude Film Distribution)

to stutter, shifting us, along with the characters, into what Deleuze would call an ‘any-space-whatever’ of longing, a bubble that quickly bursts, bringing us back to the mundane space of the diner, with Franklin’s song now relegated to the background.

A second musical moment is again triggered by the jukebox, when Kevin stops to play the song that sparked his memories of Chiron, Barbara Lewis’s ‘Hello Stranger’, the reason he gives for calling him after ten years.

Hello, stranger
 It seems so good to see you back again
 How long has it been?
 It seems like a mighty long time

Jenkins describes the importance of this number in the temporal design of the film: ‘It just felt like everything was building to this halo of space that was going to be created by the wonder of the song. The whole sequence in the diner is meant to function as time outside time’ (Sullivan 2017). After circling around each other all evening, they are finally, within the space of the song, alone to look each other in the eye. By slowing time, desire is stretched and suspended to an almost agonising plasticity, to the point that the smallest of movements, the flicker of a glance, becomes an exquisite spectacle of longing, vulnerability, and acquiescence.

Then, once again, the cut of the door’s bell as we exit the dream space, followed by the silence of Black and Kevin’s awkward walk to Black’s car.

As Black turns the ignition, ‘Classic Man’, still in the stereo where we had left it, is heard differently, now through Kevin’s ears. Chiron? Is this you?

Jenkins’s sonic and temporal manipulations in *Moonlight* are at once formally stunning, drawing on a staggering range of cultural and historical juxtapositions, and emotionally poignant, opening an empathetic window into the lived experiences of a fragmented man. On each of these fronts, the film refuses the easy nostalgia or short-hand clichés that might typically be evoked by, for instance, the re-use of a familiar 1960s pop song. Through formal mutations, stuttering breaks, and narrative layering, each element of the film insists on the pressures, textures, and affective realities of this specific present. This ‘now’ may be a prism refracting a complex virtual past, but the relationship between present and past is never universalised, and contradiction persists, unresolved. *Moonlight* offers us a historical image that is uniquely manifested via the material, lived experiences of blackness and queerness, and via blackness and queerness as modalities of creating, reading, listening, and remembering.

Trauma can be mapped as a historically contingent sociological phenomenon, but it is experienced as a deep, isolating, and personal wound. The musical moment might similarly be described as an art form structured by resonant, inherent contradictions, manifested via rhythms and breaks, harmonies and counterpoints, points of visual synchrony and spatial animation, variations and refrains. Precisely because of these formal tensions, the musical moment is a particularly effective vehicle for fabulation, speculating new possibilities in bleak political times: mapping circuits of impact through individual affective experiences and broader collective patterns; recasting familiar themes such that they mark, and spark, unexpected transformations; teasing out moments of genuine joy, not to escape from the real, but to look it fully in the eyes, to feel it, and open it to change. The musical moments I have outlined here tell us something about what the musical moment can do, or what some musical moments can do, or what some musical moments can do very well, in responding to, reflecting upon, and reimagining our own historical moment. Each of these moments stages musical arguments regarding difference, making a case, not just for increased representation, but for creative improvisation, for the reactivation of lost histories, for forging artistic links between moments and ideas, between individuals and collectives, for welcoming moments that shock us into thinking, and re-remembering differently. Each of these works, too, makes use of interruption, recontextualised refrains, clashing juxtapositions, and speculative leaps. Instead of closure

and a satisfying finale, we are more likely to encounter the intrusion of another rhythm, a counter-memory, another temporal pressure. In these darkest of times, the musical moment might offer an invitation for an interpretive intervention, a transformative connection, a glimpse of futurity arising from profound precarity.

NOTES

1. More recently, Phil Powrie's formulation of the 'crystal-song' brilliantly excavates the experience of musical numbers in film, linking the pleasures of surprise, and repetition to the peculiar temporality of musical moments. Here time is both personal and historically and politically contingent (Powrie 2017).
2. See, for example, Arthur Knight (2002), Dyer (2002, 2013), Griffin (2002), Smith (2005), and Garcia (2014).
3. The video can be streamed online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2lXD0vv-ds8>.
4. *Moonlight* contains three distinct acts in which the lead character is referred to by changing nicknames as he ages (Little, 9, Chiron, 16, and Black, adult) and is played by three different actors (respectively, Alex Hibbert, Ashton Sanders, and Trevante Rhodes). The role of Kevin is also played by three different actors in each act (Jaden Piner, Jharrel Jerome, André Holland).
5. In an interview with the *New York Times*, Britell describes his process of composing and chopping and screwing, with audio examples. See Cooper (2017), online at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/21/arts/music/moonlight-movie-score-music-oscar.html>.

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The Acoustic Wound: Reflections on the Crystal-Song in Five American Films

Phil Powrie

The musical moments¹ that interest me are those that affect us profoundly, intervening in our experience of watching a film. The frisson we may well feel as a result of such events momentarily superimposes an intensely personal emotional space on the diegetic space of the film. It creates a new space, an affective archaeological space, constructed of overlapping layers with oblique seams of meaning; these include the connotations of the music, colliding temporalities and resurgent memories. I have tried to indicate the complexities of such moments and their intersection with what Deleuze calls sheets of time (1989) by a shorthand term, the crystal-song (Powrie 2017).

In this chapter, I will explore four points that seem to me to be typical of the crystal-song: the title song of a film; the narrative position of a song which reinforces its pivotal function; the congruence or lack of congruence with the period in which a film is set; and, finally, extreme repetition

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of a musical motif. I shall do so using several recent American films. I first explore how we can use the concept of the crystal-song to inform analysis of different types of pre-existing songs, where cultural connotations raise complex issues. The songs I shall consider all have specific contextual functions, and in each case, attention is drawn to the song. *American Honey* (Andrea Arnold, 2016) and *Beautiful Boy* (Felix Van Groeningen, 2018) are examples of songs performed by the characters and that give the films their title, adding interpretative weight to them and prodding us to consider their function relative to the film. In *Lady Bird* (Greta Gerwig, 2017), the characters not only perform the song, but also talk about it, drawing attention to its cultural associations. I continue with a song that is neither performed nor talked about and is not the title of *Call Me by Your Name* (Luca Guadagnino, 2017). But as is the case with all the other examples, the crystal-song draws attention to itself and in so doing forces us to consider its function in ways that the remainder of the music is less likely to do; that function is pivotal and has a strong relationship with time, memory and affect. Finally, I focus on a diegetic piece composed for *La La Land* (Damian Chazelle, 2016) which is performed at different points of the film. I am taking as an example a composed rather than pre-existing piece so as to reflect on the structuration of the crystal-song without the additional complexities of a pre-existing piece's cultural connotations or the complications raised by lyrics. But it is also to demonstrate that a 'crystal-song' does not have to be a song with lyrics, nor indeed the flamboyant number often found in musicals; what draws our attention to its structuring function is the fact that it is repeated on several occasions, at critical moments of the narrative. All of these examples serve to generate intense affect at moments of narrative crisis while also demanding our critical attention in answer to the question: Why does this musical moment affect me so deeply and (retrospectively) so much more than any of the other musical moments in the film?

One of the issues raised by the term crystal-song is that it could be seen as a convenient way of creating distance by turning the musical moments I have mentioned into reified objects of analysis. However, the spatial doubling of the crystal-song—the superimposition of intense emotion on the diegetic space—allows us at one and the same time to feel vividly a particular moment in the narrative flow while remaining attentive to that flow. Paradoxically, in such moments we can, I suggest, retain a critical distance both from the flow of the diegesis and from the intensity of feeling overlaying it, precisely because of the spatial

doubling: we follow the story but we also follow our feeling, in what I have suggested (Powrie 2017: 170–171) is a combination of Barthes's *studium* and *punctum* (1982). The musical moment is always a conjuncture of image track and soundtrack that threatens to unravel the process of suture as soon as we become more aware of the music. From 'unheard', to reprise the term used by Claudia Gorbman (1987), the music can often become heard, liminally and at the edges of cognition and ratiocination, but without necessarily obtruding. The crystal-song takes this one step further, however; it un-sutures the listener, producing articulations of archaeological and temporal layers that can engulf us, that can thrill as well as cause anxiety. From being immersed in image-sound coalescence, the moment 'pricks' us like Barthes's *punctum*. Suture unravels to leave a leaking acoustic wound. We rise abruptly to the surface, immersion becoming emersion, a momentary disengagement from the narrative; indeed, immersion and emersion occur in one and the same moment of intense feeling.

Such an intensely affective experience is not necessarily felt by everyone; moreover, the crystal-song that precipitates this flush of feeling in me may not do the same thing for you. This may seem like something of an insurance clause in theoretical terms. Indeed, even when they accept the concept, colleagues have questioned the validity of crystal-song examples I have used. But clearly if the intensity felt during a crystal-song is partly due to memory work and intimate personal connotations, it stands to reason that a crystal-song is particularly and intensely subjective. I see no contradiction in a musical moment that appeals at the same time to the heart and to the head; there is every reason to celebrate surges of emotion, musical moments during which aesthetic rationalisation commingles with euphoric poignancy. I am also attracted to the idea that what we feel when we view and listen to a film may well be evanescent and conjunctural. What I feel on the first viewing may not occur for subsequent viewings; equally, music 'unheard' in a first viewing may well come to haunt me in further viewings. And then there is always the possibility that a song may haunt me every time I hear it in a film, raising the question of whether the crystal-song's effect of intense affect is extendible in time and subject to repetition.

Arguably, the subjective nature of what we might feel on listening to a particular musical moment could occur at any time in a film, conditional on memory work and personal connotation. The crystal-song does more than generate intense affect, however. It crystallises critical moments in

the narrative of a film, and for this reason is unlikely to emerge at the start or at the end of a film. The intensity of the musical moment induces in the listener a particular attentiveness and an ascription of ‘momentousness’ to what is happening in the diegesis. I mean by this the standard definition of ‘momentous’, which indicates an awareness of the significance of a decision or the weight of an event that is deemed to have implications for the future. In the recesses of the word’s etymological history is also the meaning of mobility, of giving movement and of being moved. This suggests the critical function of the crystal-song, its crystallisation of temporalities in an intervention that brings together past, present and future. It calls up the past for the listener through its personal connotations, but also through its gestures to the past within the film’s diegesis. Part of the thrill experienced on hearing a crystal-song will, therefore, be its conjuncture of personal and diegetic pasts in the context of the present narrative and the conjuring of presumed future events in that narrative. The work of analysis, such as the present chapter, attends to and identifies the conditions that might allow such privileged musical moments to occur.

To function as a crystal-song a musical moment must be in some senses singular and differentiated from other parts of the soundtrack. In that respect it conforms to Ian Conrich and Estella Tincknell’s view of the musical moment as ‘a particular point of disruption [...] which is most notable for its potential to disturb the text through its unexpectedness or at times excessiveness’, although I do not agree that it is always ‘an isolated musical presence in a non-musical film’ (2006: 2). A musical moment can be talked about before we hear it, it can be repeated, in both cases drawing attention to itself, and leading to enhanced attentiveness to differences in the music as well as the contexts in which the music occurs. Marianne Kielian-Gilbert uses the productive term ‘infolding’ for musical repetition, pointing out repetition’s potential for the transformation and reshaping of context:

Moments of difference in repetition work as impulses for transforming context, jostling with those of identification and recognition. This is suggestive of a listening experience in which one hears and absorbs something that changes sonic orientations and performance toward the future. One listens for difference that has the potential to reshape what one hears. This differentiation infolds and/or extends outward to transform the context in which it occurs. By ‘infolding’ I mean the redoubling or

folding back of experience in a self-referencing exchange that preserves difference. (2014: 503)

The transformation and reshaping pertain to music, but we can extend the point to the combination of music and image. Music can also be unusual and unexpected in the context, drawing our attention to it and away from the narrative flow, such as a diegetic song in an otherwise non-diegetic musical soundscape. If a song, it can be sung in its entirety, stretching the moment and reshaping the economics of the narrative. And finally, often combined with one or more of these criteria, the music can be performed, so that what we might feel in our body is ‘infolded’ in the body of the performer, listening becoming in part what I would like to call, so as to differentiate it from the problematic term ‘identification’, *haptic palimpsest*. The intense affect we feel is overlaid on the presumed feelings of the characters and may well be at odds with them in some cases by virtue of its very subjectiveness.

Whether we are dealing with a repeated musical moment, where a song’s narrative importance is likely to be constructed cumulatively, as is the case in my examples from *La La Land* and *Lady Bird*, or a single instance of a song, as in *American Honey*, *Beautiful Boy* and *Call Me by Your Name*, my contention is that unlike what happens in the majority of film musicals, the crystal-song does not pause the narrative so much as reconfigure it in its pivotal function, wounding it, reshaping it, reflecting the film and reflecting on the film.

THE TITLE SONG: *AMERICAN HONEY* AND *BEAUTIFUL BOY*

When we hear a song that references the title of the film we are watching we are likely to feel that the song is more significant than others in the film, or at the very least we are likely to consider how the song is related to the film’s title. This is all the more the case for *American Honey*, a road movie in which the freewheeling group of characters are constantly and exuberantly singing along to and sometimes dancing to songs as they travel around the American Midwest selling magazine subscriptions. But it is not just the fact that our attention is drawn to the songs in general, turning the film into a kind of realist musical, or as one reviewer put it less kindly, ‘a music video of tediously exaggerated proportions’ (Sexton 2016). It is also because amongst the many songs we hear, the title song is the only country song, the film’s ‘only major on-the-nose musical choice [...], especially given how at odds the song is to their choice of music to

that point' (Farley 2016). Moreover, 'American Honey' is mentioned in passing earlier in the film by the mag crew's boss, Krystal, when she asks Star if she knows the song (00:21:06). And in the many interviews Andrea Arnold gave at the time of the film, she talked of the song's emotional importance for her. Indeed, when asked specifically about the mention of the song by Krystal, she hinted at its symbolic weight for her personally:

AVClub: what was the order—did the song come first, and then the line from Krystal [Riley Keough] that star is an 'American honey', and then the title?

AA: I think the song probably came first. Then it started to take on this feeling of what I was trying to do with the film [...] [It] seemed to start symbolizing something that felt like the bigger picture in the film. So that came first. And then the title from that, and then Krystal saying that (2016).

We only hear the title song towards the end of the film (2:33:00). The main character, Star (Sasha Lane), has slept with the leader of the group, the charismatic Jake (Shia LaBeouf), but has prostituted herself to earn more money. Jake comes to see her, bloodied, and we assume he has beaten up her client. They argue, and Krystal tells Star that she has let Jake go. The van comes to pick the team up, and Jake, inexplicably to Star—and to us—is in the van. 'American Honey' comes on the radio, and most of the crew, but not Star, sing along to it, one of the crew, QT, looking at Star and winking at her as she sings. As one otherwise hostile reviewer pointed out, this musical moment is amongst the film's most 'cathartic' scenes; the other one he refers to is the meet-cute sequence at the start of the film in which Jake attracts Star to the crew when they are both shopping in a supermarket and he gets up onto a checkout counter dancing to Rihanna's 'We Found Love' (00:05:46). Both sequences are

daringly obvious and openhearted, even ridiculous, in their pursuit of an emotion or idea. They generate the precious few bursts of seeming spontaneity: the flirty, stuck-out tongue [...] Star [...] throws at Jake [...] in a Rihanna-blasting department store; the sweet little wink-back QT [...] sends to Star over the Lady Antebellum chorus. (King 2016)

In the final sequence that follows the Lady Antebellum song, the crew light a bonfire by a lake and celebrate, dancing to Raury's 'God's Whisper', with its insistently repeated lyrics: 'I hear God's whisper/Calling my

name/*We are the saviours*' (the dance around the bonfire reprises Raury's video of the song). Star is pulled aside by Jake who privately hands her a turtle. Star takes it to the edge of the water and releases it before following the turtle into the water. She immerses herself fully before rising out of the water.

'*American Honey*' could be interpreted as a reflection of the narrative and the characters' feelings: Star and Jake were together, they have argued, and the song suggests a yearning for the status quo ante of their relationship, with its 'I miss those days', 'wanna go back in time' and 'got to get back to her somehow'. But it also suggests much more: the return to an almost prelapsarian innocence, emphasised by 'God's Whisper' in the final sequence, a life not just before Jake, but before life in the gig economy that Star has stumbled upon. Key to this interpretation is the fact that the song has already been mentioned in the film, as I pointed out above, and that Star quite clearly does not know the song; she is left out as the others in the crowded van sing it. This marks her out from the crew; as Ira Madison points out, she does not quite fit into this all-white group (2016). She is out of place in an ethical elsewhere of which we get occasional glimpses when she buys groceries for the family of a drug addict rather than try to get them to subscribe to the magazines.

The following and final sequence, in which Jake and Star appear to make up, brings apparently positive closure to the question of their relationship; but the film finishes with Star apart from the others, quietly baptising herself in the lake. It is a new beginning rooted in the innocence of the past that goes well beyond Jake and Star's romance, and in which she values her independence, as the lyrics to 'God's Whisper' make clear: 'I won't compromise/I won't live a life on my knees'. Star lives life on the edge and doubly so: she is on the edge of a group who themselves are already on the edge. The combination of the prelapsarian past ('I just wanna go back in time') in '*American Honey*' and a wandering collective future in a dislocated present over which Star has a precarious purchase ('I gotta get back to her somehow') is precisely what makes the film's very white title song a crystal-song, as opposed to the merely joyous exuberance of the other songs we hear, which are all hip-hop or RnB; it is hardly surprising that it gives its title to the film.

Beautiful Boy is about the relationship between a father (Steve Carell) and his drug-addict son Nic (Timothée Chalamet). The song that gives its title to *Beautiful Boy* is by John Lennon from his last album *Double Fantasy* (1980) and refers to the son he had with Yoko Ono, Sean, born in

1975. Like *American Honey*, the soundtrack is saturated with music in an eclectic mix that was much critiqued by reviewers; the *Observer* reviewer considered that the film's 'worst flaw' is 'one of the most annoying and intrusive musical scores in years that drowns every emotion in musical chaos. Almost every scene is overwhelmed and the dialogue obliterated by decibel-crunching rock and roll' (Reed 2018). Like 'American Honey', the title song of *Beautiful Boy* is very different from the otherwise insistently loud music heard elsewhere. It occurs halfway through the film, after Nic has been in hospital and is rescued by his father David who books him into rehab. David croons the song in a flashback during which he tucks Nic as a child into bed before sending him on a flight to his mother, before we hear it sung by Lennon as David takes Nic to the airport (00:58:00). The lyrics—'Close your eyes/Have no fear/The monster's gone/He's on the run and your daddy's here'—quite clearly emphasise the close relationship between the two; but more than that, they pull us into a utopian past at odds with the dystopian present. David tucks the grown Nic into a blanket in their hotel room, and this simple action recalls a similar tucking in at the time of a difficult separation in the past.

This is a less powerful crystal-song than 'American Honey' because it too obviously appeals to sentimentality. But it nonetheless functions as a pivotal moment in the father's struggle to help his son, its pivotal nature, as was the case with 'American Honey', emphasised by its contrast with the other songs, its position in the narrative, the insistent close-ups of father and son, and, finally, the fact that it is performed by David. It is the performed aspect that interests me here above all: the close-ups suggest what would normally be called 'identification' with the character; but the character played by Carell in my view serves as a vehicle for something deeper mobilised by the song he sings. We may well identify with him; but he functions as an enabler of intense feeling generated by the song, made all the more intense by the fact that he croons it 'artlessly', as Gorbman might put it (2011); our subjective and personal space is overlaid on his, as haptic palimpsest, encouraging identification, but stretching it and reshaping it through affect to something else.

THE SONG THAT THE CHARACTERS TALK ABOUT: *LADY BIRD*

The song that interests me in coming-of-age film *Lady Bird*—‘Crash into Me’—is talked about in a more obvious way than Krystal’s mention of ‘American Honey’ to Star, and is repeated on a number of occasions. We hear it in three sequences of the film, first when Lady Bird (Saoirse Ronan) has broken up with her boyfriend who has turned out to be gay, and weeps in a car with her best friend Julie (Beanie Feldstein; 00:34:00). The song is reprised, again in a car, when Lady Bird is driving to the school prom with her new group of friends whose company she has sought while abandoning Julie (01:09:00). Her pretentious ‘cool-guy’ boyfriend, Kyle (Timothée Chalamet), on hearing ‘Crash into Me’ being played on the radio, says ‘I fucking hate this song’. Lady Bird rebels, saying that she loves it, and asks to be driven to her friend Julie’s house. She and Julie make up, and in its third iteration the song functions as non-diegetic foregrounded sonic overlay; we hear only the song with no ambient sounds or dialogue as the two girlfriends enjoy themselves at the prom (01:11:50).

‘Crash into Me’ is a well-known song by the American rock group Dave Matthews Band. It reached number 7 on the 1997 US *Billboard* Modern Rock Tracks chart and was nominated for the 1998 Grammy Awards. The cultural context of the song is as important as the narrative context, more so than Lady Antebellum’s song in *American Honey*. ‘Crash into Me’ was one of the most talked-about aspects of the film on release. It was, said one reviewer, ‘one of the great music moments in film in 2017. Even those people who hate Dave Matthews Band and “Crash into Me” found themselves falling for the song’ (Sharf 2018). In the early 2000s when the film’s events take place, Dave Matthews Band was considered by many as tedious middle-of-the-road music—‘middlebrow, mainstream radio bro-rock’ (McDermott 2018), hence Kyle’s aggressive rejection of it. The song is a cultural fit for the period and for the type of adolescent fantasies about sex that the film’s characters obsess over: ‘If you were in college around then, you know you couldn’t sneeze without hitting a melancholy dude finger-picking “Crash into Me” on an acoustic guitar’ (Purdom 2018). There is, therefore, a nostalgic charge in the song for early-millennials; as the film’s director Greta Gerwig said in a much-publicised interview, in terms that recall Andrea Arnold’s comments on ‘American Honey’, she felt that it was ‘an incredibly romantic song, and

I always wanted to make out to that song, and I never did' (Petrusich 2018).

The song is pivotal in narrative terms, acting as a 'spine, with each act hinging into the next alongside the breakup-to-“Crash” routine' (Purdom 2018). It allows Lady Bird to accept her dissatisfaction with the relationship she has with Kyle and his overly sophisticated friends, and to recognise the value of Julie (Beanie Feldstein); when her new friends ask her 'who's Julia?', she responds 'my best friend'. The song's middle-of-the-roadness is a knowing rejection at both the level of the narrative and in terms of audience reactions to the 'irony and dissonance, touchstones of brooding-hipster culture' and the acceptance by Lady Bird of 'an interiority that doesn't hew to her own expectations of herself' (Petrusich 2017). It is an idiosyncratic return to an adolescent past with its clumsy and excessive affects—the first time we hear it, the two girls sing along to it tearfully—combined with a rejection of the emerging hipster future.

The crystal-songs I have considered so far—'American Honey', 'Beautiful Boy' and 'Crash into Me'—do not just have diegetic performance in common, something that enables the hapticity characteristic of the crystal-song. They are all used to bring characters together at a critical moment in the narrative, and in each case, they celebrate not just the moment of community but the separation from that community: Star accepts the end of her romance with Jake, as does Lady Bird with Kyle, and Dave accepts his son's drug addiction. The next example I would like to consider is a single non-diegetic song, in other words the type of song that does not obviously have characteristics that would attract our attention, such as being talked about, repeated or performed.

THE ANACHRONIC SONG: *CALL ME BY YOUR NAME*

Call Me by Your Name takes place in Italy in 1983 and recounts the coming out of teenager Elio (Timothée Chalamet), the son of an American professor of archaeology (Michael Stuhlbarg), with Oliver (Armie Hammer), the professor's doctoral student. Elio is precocious: he speaks several languages, spends his time reading, transcribing classical music and playing the guitar or piano; like the other films I have discussed, this one is musically saturated. Elio resents Oliver because he has had to give him his bedroom. They both pursue heterosexual relationships, but are gradually drawn to each other, and sleep together in a brief but intense romance until Oliver returns to the USA. At the end of the film, Oliver writes to

Elio to tell him that he is engaged to be married to a woman, and the film closes on Elio's tears.

The song that interests me, 'Futile Devices', occurs approximately in the middle of the film (01:03:42); unlike the other crystal-songs discussed so far, it is non-diegetic and unperformed. Elio and Oliver have kissed and Elio is waiting for him assuming that they will sleep together. We hear the song as Elio waits for Oliver, who returns home late but goes straight to his room. At first sight, the song appears to do no more than illustrate the narrative and Elio's emotions. For example, the lines 'It's been a long, long time/Since I've memorised your face/It's been four hours now' clearly express Elio's desire for Oliver. But the musical context of the song suggests that its function is more complex. The soundtrack is mainly composed of diegetic music, whether it is classical music played by Elio on guitar or piano or pop numbers heard as background, for example in a club scene. The latter correspond more or less to the year in which the narrative is set, 1983, as they were all released 1981–1984.² 'Futile Devices', however, is composed and sung by Sufjan Stevens, taken from his 2010 album *The Age of Adz*. Stevens contributed two other songs for the film, both originals, one of which, 'Mystery of Love', which we hear as Elio accompanies Oliver when he leaves for the USA, received an Oscar nomination. The other song, 'Visions of Gideon', is heard right at the end of the film when Elio is crying after Oliver has left. Both of these songs do no more than emphasise what Elio is feeling. In the first, the singer recalls a first kiss, evoking Alexander the Great's lover Hephaestion: 'Like Hephaestion who died/Alexander's lover/Now my riverbed has dried/Shall I find no other?' In 'Visions of Gideon' the singer laments 'I have loved you for the last time [...] /And I have kissed you for the last time'. Unlike these two songs, 'Futile Devices' does more than echo Elio's feelings, in three distinct ways.

First, it is difficult not to notice that it is the first of the three non-diegetic numbers in the film, drawing attention to what is happening in the narrative. It underlines what is a pause in the narrative, all the more so because Elio is waiting for Oliver. We see him waiting interminably in the failing light, the image and the music floating in the penumbra. Once he has returned to his room, Elio waits nervously and impatiently, his impatience evident from his fidgeting. The lyrics stress the difficulty of expressing the desire that courses through his body: 'I would say I love you/But saying it out loud is hard/[...] Words are futile devices'. That futility is underlined by the difficulty Elio has in reading his book in the

failing light, an activity that might have filled the gap left by his lover's absence.

Second, we briefly see the flickering image of a celluloid strip during this sequence (see Fig. 3.1), which attracts our attention but which is inexplicable in the film's context. In a Q&A at the 2017 New York Film Festival, the director Luca Guadagnino explained that the film returned from the lab with the defect and that he decided to retain it because it corresponded, as he put it, to the ephemeral nature of Elio's feelings.³ The confusion that we as spectators might feel in understanding the image, therefore, corresponds to Elio's confusion. He loves Oliver but does not know how to express that love; words fail him, they are 'futile devices', much like the film fails to maintain the illusion of realist narrative at that point, introducing external elements: a non-diegetic song and a break in the fourth wall.

Third, the song functions as a bridge between expectation and disappointment, between love and hate, as is made clear when Elio realises that Oliver will not come to him and spits out the word 'traitor'. This occurs on the final words of the song—'words are futile devices'—when Elio has realised that he cannot find words to express his love and desire for Oliver. 'Futile Devices' functions as the narrative pivot of the film, emphasising the moment when everything in the relationship between Elio and Oliver



Fig. 3.1 The celluloid strip in *Call Me by Your Name* (Courtesy Sony Pictures)

changes, because Elio finally understands that his grudges against Oliver hide his love for him. This twilight moment corresponds to what Richard Dyer writes on the ‘sad young man’ in such moments of transition:

Twilight [...] connotes sadness [...]; it is also a period of transition, which here is not so much that of childhood to adulthood as between straight and gay worlds. The idea of a ‘half-world’ suggests both being in between the sexes and also not being a self-sufficient world [...] The sad young man allows for an expression of the experience of libidinal fluidity while offering the reassurance that it will not last. (Dyer 1998: 86, 88)

The impact of the song, to which our attention is so forcefully drawn by its sudden non-diegetic nature, and sudden disruption of the realist aesthetic, is quite unlike the utopian musical moment common in film musicals. Like the title song of *Beautiful Boy*, and, as we shall see, like ‘Mia and Sebastian’s Theme’ in *La La Land*, the song is deeply melancholic and nostalgic, reflecting on the ‘could-have-been’. On the other hand, the crystal-songs in *American Honey* and *Lady Bird* celebrate utopian community in the more familiar utopian aesthetic of film musicals. It is perhaps not coincidental that the dystopian flavour is connected with male characters in films directed by men, while the utopian flavour, conversely, is associated with female characters in films directed by women.

My final case study is a musical. Standard musicals are constructed around a sequence of musical numbers, generally involving song and dance, and are utopian in nature (Dyer 1977). Arguably, the concept of a crystal-song is less appropriate for a musical genre in which specific musical numbers are less likely to stand out. The purpose of this final case study is threefold: to demonstrate that crystal-songs can function in this genre; second, that cumulative repetition of a performed number can be a feature of the crystal-song; finally, that the crystal-song does not have to be a song with lyrics. Precisely because a musical has a sequence of generally spectacular song-and-dance numbers, which we expect, my contention is that the crystal-song is less likely to be one of them. The crystal-song, like Barthes’s *punctum* (and Conrich and Tincknell’s ‘musical moment’), is often unexpected, it ‘rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow’; it is ‘the accident which pricks’, searing like a sudden ‘wound’ (Barthes 1982: 26–27), causing a bleeding of the narrative body.

THE SONG WITHOUT WORDS: *LA LA LAND*

La La Land is a musical with a standard boy-meets-girl narrative in which the boy and the girl are both struggling in their careers, Mia as an actress and Seb as a jazz musician. They get together, drift apart, and become successful artists; but unlike the standard narrative they stay apart. The film ends on a nostalgic but dystopian moment when they share the song that became ‘their song’. The song that won an Oscar in *La La Land* was ‘City of Stars’ (00:46:17–00:48:00), and it would not be unreasonable to assume that it functions as a crystal-song. Counter-intuitively, I want to claim that a more pivotal song, the film’s crystal-song, is ‘Mia and Sebastian’s Theme’. This is partly because ‘City of Stars’ is constantly repeated as backscore as well as in set pieces, being something closer to a leitmotif (of which more below). ‘Mia and Sebastian’s Theme’, however, occurs five times in three major sequences, either in piano solo or in orchestral arrangements, generally filtered through Mia’s perceptions, and unlike ‘City of Stars’ the song scores (in both senses) critical moments of the narrative.

1. (00:16:18) On the first occasion, Mia hears Seb playing his tune as she passes the club where he is the pianist. We witness her amazement first at the beauty of the music, and second when she realises that she has seen Seb before, and then her disappointment as Seb, who has just been fired for playing the tune rather than the required playlist, bumps past her on his way out.
2. (00:23:10) The same scene is repeated in a section seen from Seb’s point of view. Already, then, the tune being used to bring the two leads together, the meet-not-so-cute, is split into two variant perceptions of that event.
3. (00:51:24) Later Mia fantasises that she hears the tune when attending a boring restaurant meal with her boyfriend and his friends, when she had promised Seb a date to see a film that evening. She is amazed to hear the tune, as we are, and rushes to meet Seb.
4. (00:55:40) They go to see *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955) and subsequently visit the planetarium that is the location for the film’s gay subtext—the (Platonic) love between Plato (Sal Mineo) and Jim (James Dean)—and Plato’s later death at the hands of the police. Seb and Mia’s ecstatically utopian heterosexual melodrama swamps the dystopian homosexual connotations as they waltz into the air

and dance through the clouds (see Fig. 3.2), the sequence ending with an old-fashioned iris shot on their kiss. We would be forgiven for thinking that this seals their relationship, but it is only half-way through the film; the second half explores the gradual collapse of their relationship.

5. (01:50:19) We hear the tune again towards the end of the film when Mia, now happily married to someone else and a successful film star, stumbles on Seb's Café, and watches him play the tune as she had done at the start of the film. This time, in a long fantasy sequence, events from their relationship seen in the first half of the film are replayed in utopian mode as, we assume, Mia and Seb's fantasy of what could have been their life together. Instead of brushing past her as had happened earlier in the film, in this fantasy they kiss, for example, and have children.

Seb's tune ties the two halves of the film together, bringing Mia and Seb back together nostalgically at the end, and replaying the past in a melancholic time loop. While the crystal-song here is not the *punctum's* 'anterior future of which death is the stake' (Barthes 1982: 96) when he looks at the photo of the man to be executed, nonetheless Seb's tune articulates the conditional perfect, a 'could-have-been (if only....)'. It articulates a utopian nostalgia for what has been lost (his attachment to jazz and then to Mia), scoring the utopian surface of the film with an acoustic wound redolent with loss.



Fig. 3.2 Seb and Mia in the planetarium (Courtesy Lions Gate Home Entertainment)

Three films with narratives of lost love are very knowingly referenced in *La La Land*, two in the same moment: when Mia shows Seb round the film-sets, she points out to him the window from which Bogart and Bergman looked out in *Casablanca* (1942; 00:39:35), so recalling the iconic scene in Rick's café when Bergman asks Sam to play 'As Time Goes By', a song that arguably has the same function as the tune Seb plays in *La La Land*. At the same time, we see a shop window selling umbrellas below the window, recalling the equally melancholic dystopia of Jacques Demy's musical *Les Parapluies de Cherbourg* (*The Umbrellas of Cherbourg*, 1964). *La La Land* replays these two films, alongside *Rebel Without a Cause*, all three films incorporating a dystopian subtext formally within the broader generic framework of Donen-Kelly musicals, utopia and dystopia jostling side by side. 'Mia and Sebastian's Theme' is a crystal-song, as it crystallises time and mixed feeling through its narrative and its refracted genre manipulations.

A natural objection to my concept of the crystal-song would be that 'Mia and Sebastian's Theme' is no more than a leitmotif, sentimental, lightweight, and no more pregnant with intense affect than the Oscar-winning 'City of Stars'. However, a leitmotif attempts to provide continuity as part of the narrative weave, or to use a term common in linguistics, it is diachronic, as I have pointed out elsewhere (Powrie 2017: 239). The crystal-song, on the other hand, is not concerned with continuity but with critical moments of change, whether the song is singular or repeated, moments in which strands of time coalesce; it is synchronic.

CONCLUSION

The crystal-song is a moment in film that we feel is pivotal. It is marked by intense affect which is of necessity subjective as it depends on constellations of connotation and memories. But there are less subjective conditions for the crystal-song. The conditions all have singularity or disruption at their core; they draw attention to the music and in so doing momentarily deflect our attention from the narrative to a network of constellating affects. It is then and only then that subjective criteria determine the impact of the song, and the extent to which we may feel the acoustic wound it generates.

When we hear a title song, for example, as in the cases of *American Honey* and *Beautiful Boy*, sudden recognition drives us to the hermeneutic imperative, if only momentarily, of seeking some kind of

meaning. When characters talk about the music we hear (*Lady Bird*); when the music is repeated (*Lady Bird*, *La La Land*); when it is performed, especially when that performance is imperfect (*American Honey*, *Beautiful Boy*, *Lady Bird*, *La La Land*); when the music occurs at a point in the narrative that we recognise as pivotal (*La La Land*, *Beautiful Boy*, *Lady Bird*); when, finally, we become aware that the music is not congruent in terms of period with other parts of the soundtrack (*Call Me by Your Name*, *Beautiful Boy*), our attention shifts from the forward propulsion of the narrative, the diachronic unfolding of events, to a synchronic infolding, to use the term coined by Marianne Kielian-Gilbert.

For her that infolding leads to recombinations that ‘become and perform temporal difference’ (2014: 502) that may leave us unmoved, ‘un-momentised’ to suggest a neologism. But when the musical moment generates flushes of affect connected with involuntary memories and connotations, it becomes a crystal-song. The intensity of feeling in such crystal-songs does not only recombine moments in time. We are both infolded in such moments, reliving them, as well as outfolded in bursts of time and affect; to recall the terms I used earlier, we are both immersed but at the same time emersed. ‘Emersion’ signifies not just emergence from submersion, but also ‘the reappearance of the sun or moon from shadow after eclipse, or of a star or planet after occultation’ (OED). The crystal-song submerges us in affect, briefly eclipsing the narrative in an intense musical moment, from which we emerge ‘pricked’ (Barthes 1982: 96), changed, astonished, and moved by the perfect congruence of what we see and what we hear.

NOTES

1. To use the term coined by Conrich and Tincknell (2006) and taken up by Herzog (2009).
2. In the order in which we hear them: ‘M.A.Y. in the Backyard’ (1984), ‘J’adore Venice’ (1982), ‘Paris Latino’ (1983), ‘Lady Lady Lady’ (1985), ‘Love My Way’ (1982), ‘Germination’ (1983), ‘Words’ (1981), ‘Radio Varsavia’ (1982).
3. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JCJquKusENs> (34:56–46:00).

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PART II

How The Musical Moment Was
Created—Musical Numbers in Silent
and Early Sound Cinema



Musical Moments as Narrative and Emotional Catalysts in Three Silent Films by Jacques Feyder

Dominique Nasta

As many studies have shown, the link between cinema, psychology and music played an important role both theoretically and practically during the French avant-garde of the 1920s. Following my sustained interest in the uses of music as emotional catalyst in both silent and sound films, in this chapter, I consider Belgian-born director Jacques Feyder's extremely original handling of the musical component as an intra-filmic narrative marker at work in some of his silent films. The beginning of the twenty-first century saw, thanks to the joint efforts of European and US archives and restoration labs, the emergence of finely restored versions with newly recorded musical scores for Feyder's three late silent films, *Visages d'enfants* (*Faces of Children*, 1925), *Gribiche* (1926) and *Les Nouveaux Messieurs* (*The New Gentlemen*, 1928), two of which were

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produced by the Franco-Russian company Albatros (Albera 1995: 144). Notwithstanding their live or recorded musical accompaniment, which most certainly differed for each screening, the three films demonstrate Feyder's mastery of the musical moment in its contrapuntal relationship to the narrative and in the way it structures emotion and affect.¹

A 'craftsman' as he modestly put it, Jacques Feyder (1885–1948) was nonetheless considered one of the great film directors of the 1920s and 1930s. He was critical of the French social and political environment but did so in aesthetically refined work, which included experimentation with avant-garde techniques, whether these were modest or costly prestige productions. He travelled, lived and worked in four different European countries and his career included a brief Hollywood interlude, mainly as a director for early foreign-language sound film versions. He directed cinema icons such as Greta Garbo and Marlene Dietrich. His darker silent narratives announced Poetic Realism. One of that movement's flag-bearers, Marcel Carné, was Feyder's assistant on *Les Nouveaux Messieurs*, and Feyder's one-time secretary, his compatriot Charles Spaak, was the author of many prominent screenplays of Poetic Realism, most notably Feyder's classic *La Kermesse héroïque* (*Carnival in Flanders*, 1935).

Alongside French auteurs from the 1920s, Feyder expressed nuances of subjectivity and feeling within the wider ontological framework of film art. Intertitles or intradiegetic printed words (letters, signs, book covers), the only resources of natural language that could be relied upon in silent cinema, often play a purely prosthetic role in early film theory. The films of Delluc, Epstein, Gance, L'Herbier, and Dulac conspicuously 'photogenise' both intertitles and intradiegetic writing: Epstein describes words as 'capturing an emotion or, lower on the stem, the sensation at the very moment they enter into the resonating chamber of the intelligence' (Wall-Romana 2013: 131). Feyder's silent naturalist films focusing mainly on children, namely *Craïnquebille* (1923), *Visages d'enfants* and *Gribiche*, demonstrate his outstanding ability to bring to life passionate and poignant young characters, while using French Impressionist techniques, such as superimpositions, visually but also aurally relevant point-of-view shots and dream sequences, in order to express character subjectivity.

Feyder's two feature films commissioned by the Russian émigrés' production company Albatros bear the imprint of the company's ambitions for controversial and challenging narratives and for aesthetic originality in a still hesitant inter-war French film industry context. Albatros became the hub of the French avant-garde, with experiments in all directions while turning its back on literary or pictorial cinema: the films shot in their Montreuil Hollywood-like studios are considered the paragons of a new aesthetics.

According to Marc Mélon (1998: 198), some dominant features are worth considering in Feyder's work. Most characters in his films are ambivalent and ready to leave their family life, financial comfort and profession, so as to pursue their wildest dreams. The story lines focus on complementary concepts such as quest and loss, a man's present and the bonds with his past. The films themselves oscillate between two universes, most often between opposite extremes: thus there are frequent comings and goings; characters hesitate to abandon the world they belong or are attached to and plunge into the unknown. The overall dynamic of Feyder's narratives relies on the delicate balance between fantasy and reality; between the unappeased pursuit of happiness and the danger of getting lost; between the necessity of leaving and the obligation to remain; and between the wish to go on living or to die. The essence of Feyder's style is to be found in this subtle and dense oscillation, difficult to seize, yet so rewarding, and which is frequently expressed in quasi-musical editing, often best illustrated in musical sequences as we see characters dance or sing.

In this chapter, I show how such musical moments in Feyder's late silent cinema output are important narrative and emotional catalysts. Both within his melodramas and in his lighter comedies, the narration is, to use David Bordwell's established theoretical terms, 'subordinated to broad emotional impact' and 'will be highly communicative about information pertaining to the characters' emotional states. The narration will be quite unrestricted in range [...] so that the film can engender pity, irony and other dissociated emotions' (1985: 70).

Feyder uses musical moments to diversify the narrative, while considerably increasing the degree of suspense and audience participation. I use the term 'musical moment' in Amy Herzog's sense, as a moment 'when music inverts the image-sound hierarchy to occupy a dominant position in a filmic work', as a 'point of rupture in the larger context of the film'

(2009: 7). I argue that within the *modus operandi* of a silent film, foregrounding musical elements also appears to be ‘the visualization of (the aesthetic experience of immersion), to embody the feeling of being carried away by the musical force bigger than any individual being’ (Herzog 2009: 28). The broadly accepted view of music meant to accompany silent films either through live performances or via gramophone recordings is that it relied, at least until the 1920s, on often rearranged pre-existing music by well-known classical composers (Anderson 1988: xiv–xv; Brown 2014: 598), and that it served to homogenise an otherwise disparate image track:

Sound did not articulate the image so much in points of synchronization as through musical continuity. The fundamental function of music was to underscore the underlying narrative structure, by establishing a musical unit of structure, the musical cue, that is extended across shots, binding them together into a larger unit. [...] Music of the silent film belonged to the world of the the audience, the world of live performance, rather than the world of the film. (Buhler and Neumeyer 2014: 20)

My argument takes issue with this view. It is closer to the one developed by Laurent Guido in his seminal work *L'Âge du rythme*: he stresses the fact that ‘in many films of the 1920s it is frequently through a musical interpretation (party sequence, cabaret, concert) that passages from visual symphonies are developed’ (2007: 208). Elsewhere, Guido also widely comments on musicologist Paul Romain’s (1895–1966) pioneering theories on ‘musicalism’ as a line of thought defining silent film parameters with elements belonging to the musical jargon: rhythm, melody, counterpoint, etc.: ‘Cinema has the property of making people feel emotions parallel to those generated by music. [...] Romain therefore demands that concordance be based on a double synchronism, that of rhythm and that of feeling’ (2002: 67). Guido mentions that Feyder, alongside Abel Gance, was labelled by reputed historian Jean Mitry as an authentic ‘*musicien du silence*’ meaning that his silent films could stand comparison with the work of an authentic music composer (2007: 178).

My focus on silent films featuring musical moments, as developed in previous contributions (Nasta 1991, 2001), is based on a phenomenon psychologists such as Carl Rogers or Jean-Jacques Nattiez have described as *subception*, as opposed to perception, or in other words, *subliminal auditive perception*. When voices, songs, instrumental or dance music,

screams and other noises are visually portrayed but not actually heard, one has to find a justification for the inaudible sound. Subception presupposes an indirect identification with stimuli and a partial recording of visual information. When the viewer partially perceives and identifies an image, some information is already there, previously recorded. Thus, in most silent films, subception is doubly articulated:

1) *Internally*, by means of very diversified auditive stimuli associated with visualised sounds from the diegesis and often related to the act of hearing or listening to specific noises or music. These stimuli can either facilitate narrative progression or suspend the diegesis to focus on the characters' intentions and purely emotional states.

2) *Externally*: by inducing a particular type of audience participation, which can be both acoustical or affective. This amounts to stating that, in most cases, audiences—past or present—do not need a materialised sound/sonic counterpart in order to have access to the visualised discourse. (Nasta 2001: 96–97; Campbell 2011: 80–81)

So as to explicate more fully this kind of musical moment, I will also refer to the phenomenon of *deferred analogy*, which philosopher Bernard Stiegler derives from Jacques Derrida's *différance*: a delay, deviation, suspension, mental time lag, an unconscious mediation through changed temporal parameters. In his essay 'La différence', Derrida argues that what is commonly associated in phenomenological terms with the 'authority of the gaze', is challenged, and hence suspended, by the overall experience provoked by sounds and/or music. On such occasions, Derrida suggests that story time is perceived differently on both the intradiegetic and on the extradiegetic levels. Following Derrida's line of thought, Stiegler provides a relevant example that may also apply to our present survey: jazz icon Charlie Parker, who not only transformed jazz standards combining them with 'lost' black music popular tunes, but also created a new discourse by means of digressions and mental time lags, audiences thus performing a double hearing (Nasta 1991: 78).

Carl Plantinga has developed a related concept, that of the affective power of the audiovisual media, namely what he calls the *baseline affective charges* linked to mood and emotions, and occurring *even when films use little if no music*. Musical rhythms and harmonies communicate to the viewer and create a *synesthetic affect* (Plantinga 2013: 103). Similarly, Berthold Hoeckner argues that 'music has both elements of transport

and transportation just as it is both expressive and illustrative, a mixture of both affect and effect' (2007: 168). I shall argue that subception, deferred analogy, baseline affective charges and synesthetic affect are characteristic of Feyder's musical moments in *Visages d'enfants*, *Gribiche*, and *Les Nouveaux Messieurs*. Taken together, they help us to understand the complex layers of Herzog's view of the musical moment as well as explain the impact of the musical moments in Feyder's films.

VISAGES D'ENFANTS

Visages d'enfants was praised by Fritz Lang and Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau for the high degree of lyricism and awareness of the world of children rarely equalled in cinema. The film is realistically shot on location in Switzerland's Haut Valais with a mix of non-professional and professional actors. Its psychological and physical harshness partly explains its poor box-office ratings. The documentary-like location shooting with real peasant figures from the Valais is coupled with dynamic impressionistic editing and pacing.

Feyder's preferred actor for his silent films centred on children, Jean Forest, plays Jean Amsler, whose grief after the early death of his mother is deep and incapacitating, especially after his father's re-marriage with a young widow. The film focuses on the young child's inner world, subtle nuances of feeling building up the film's narrative architecture. Several sequences reveal a meticulous observation of reality, such as a long funeral procession where Jean is eventually seen fainting. Feyder maintains a delicate balance between the objective observation of the milieu and Jean's feverish subjectivity. Consumed with remorse after an almost fatal deed against his stepsister, he tries to commit suicide, but is eventually saved by his stepmother during an episode of deep emotional intensity.

In an interview he gave to *Cinéma magazine*, Feyder seemed proud of using locals for the marriage scene and explained why he insisted on them acting so naturally: 'What the member of the audience looks for is a true, powerful effect, a visual impression strong enough to stir his spirit'. An essay from the same journal mentions that Feyder 'had not shown children's faces but souls [...] The technique is understated, the dances are skilfully rhythmmed and the editing is really perfect' (Phelip 1925: 254).

The climactic outdoor moment during which young Jean learns about his father's re-marriage alternates with an intense musical moment: it features the wedding celebrations, mostly dances performed and played by

extras from the rural community (see Fig. 4.1). A parallel montage shows Jean and the priest who has been counselling him, mowing the wheat in the fields. Throughout the entire wedding celebration sequence, internal emotional pacing and rhythm play an essential part: the peasant's dance appears to be a traditional one (a three-count waltz pattern), the musicians (an accordionist and violinist) are led by an improvised conductor, while the re-married couple joins the anonymous dancing crowd. Pacing and rhythm are pivotal, because the married couples' dancing gets more and more intense while the village folk dance and sing, clapping their hands and reinforcing the rhythmic energy. As neither Jean nor the priest plan to attend the wedding, the intertitles substituting the dialogue have an anticipatory added value:

- On your way back there will be some changes. Your father is getting married again.



Fig. 4.1 *Visages d'enfants*: The wedding celebration (Courtesy of Lobster Film)

- What should I call her? Mommy?
- You will call her mother.

During the whole sequence, *subception* is external, as Feyder wants us to experience the newly found happiness of the widowed father, while grasping the emotional impact the revelation of his re-marriage has on Jean. While the story is told by the priest, the wedding dances as shown in the parallel scenes indirectly ‘invade’ Jean’s subconscious. Thus, though not physically present at the celebration, Jean obviously experiences this moment internally as having unexpected consequences on his new family life. The musical moment is complicated and made even more impactful by *deferred analogy*: a mental time lag suspends the story, deferring its conclusion while creating an analogy between the turmoil of the mourning young boy and the way he reacts to the news of his father’s marriage celebrations. Such a musical moment is unique in the context of the filmed story and demonstrates to what extent silent cinema fulfils its true function, which is both to express the inner world and the most subtle nuances of an unhappy child’s feelings as well as the external reality of the wedding celebration.

Interestingly enough, Roland Cosandey mentions that no original accompanying music has been preserved, but that there must have been some musical scoring because nobody in the audience would have attended a screening without music (Cosandey 1986: 19). As noted by Guido, Swiss composer and music teacher Émile-Jaques Dalcroze criticised the musical performance of a *Visages d’enfants* screening he attended back in the 1920s, judging it much too pompous and emphatic. In Dalcroze’s opinion, using the music of theorist and creator of the *Schola Cantorum*, Vincent d’Indy, instead of Wagner’s *Tannhäuser*, would have been a much better choice for a compiled score (Guido 2007: 381).²

GRIBICHE

As was the case with Jean Epstein and René Clair, Feyder, whom Albatros director Alexander Kamenka considered ‘the greatest French filmmaker’, was invited to work at Albatros after agreeing to direct the adaptation of a rather conventional *ciné-roman* by Frédéric Boutet. A more understated work than *Visages d’enfants*, though not achieving the same heights of dramatic intensity, *Gribiche*’s narrative premise is sentimental and is as poignant, but more caustic and ironic in terms of subject

handling. After committing a good deed when returning a handbag full of money, Gribiche (Jean Forest), a working-class youth from an unsettled home living with his widowed mother, is adopted by a wealthy socialite, Madame Maranet (Françoise Rosay), who aims to reform him. Much of the enjoyment derives from the interweaving of the two worlds: that of the modest Gribiche and that of the rich socialite. The young boy will eventually return to his original milieu, keeping only the positive side of his high-brow educational interlude. The director declared in a press clip that the film was aimed at a wide audience, as it presents both the common people of Paris during the National Day celebrations, in cafés and popular balls (*bals de barrière*) as well as the elegant milieu of an American billionaire.

The fluency of the film's intricate narrative lines is indebted to highly dynamic editing techniques. Feyder alternates at a swift pace scenes from the department store, inside the taxi, on the busy streets, etc. The challenging of the initial storyline by the series of fantasised images invites the viewer to separate what is stated by the characters from what has been really going on at the very beginning. Thus, for example, when Madame Maranet decides to recount her own version of her meeting with Gribiche as a vagabond, it is clear to us that the event is the result of her powerful imagination.

The importance of hearing/listening/eavesdropping will later account for the fact that listening to music often implies and provokes emotional turmoil. During the film's final narrative pivot, Gribiche is attracted by the revelry taking place on Bastille Day and wanders through the streets of Paris to end up at his mother's place.

Crosscutting is again pivotal to the musical moment I wish to discuss. While having dinner in the sumptuous dining room showcasing lavish Art Déco sets, Gribiche hears the sound of fireworks which are explicitly shown in a parallel shot. 'It's July 14', reads an intertitle after an intriguing exchange of looks between Madame Maranet and her adopted son. Feyder further implies that Gribiche is suddenly moved by some accompanying *bal musette* tunes all too common in such circumstances: he looks clearly excited and starts humming and simulating a dance movement (see Fig. 4.2). The *bal musette* and the jazz band's sonorities activate an extended musical moment based on internal subception and, in Plantinga's terms synesthetic affect: they arouse so much nostalgia and longing in Gribiche that he will decide to abandon his artificial world.

Later on this longing will be confirmed by scenes that reveal his mother and her partner dancing at the ball he is eager to be part of.

Deferred analogy may help explain Feyder's attachment to melodramatic subjects, where feelings prevail over most generic constraints. Feyder's all-encompassing camera films the dancers, the band playing at full speed, and later the mother and her new partner. Nonetheless, the film's dynamically rhythmmed narrative is not limited to Gribiche's affective universe. Madame Maranet's servants are also seen leaving for the ball and spying on him, while the explanatory titles read: 'There's only one thing to do, to inform Madame'. Present, past and future are thus intertwined in a complex musical moment enhanced by subliminal auditive perception: the character overhears musical sounds, is moved by past memories and will eventually run off to join a multi-faceted national celebration.³

The parallel drawn between the material comfort and the joyful popular ball compelling Gribiche to leave does not only suggest a shift in



Fig. 4.2 *Gribiche*: Humming and simulating dancing on remembering music (Courtesy of Flicker Alley)

the narrative, but also configures a multi-layered emotional phenomenon. Once Gribiche, frustrated, decides to join the popular celebrations after his fascination with musical entertainment, his inner dream universe co-exists with the outside world within a very refined ironic and observational frame.

The extended musical moment can also be read in what Marc Mélon defines as being an allegorical key. We are doubly engaged and our perspective is oriented so as to grasp more than a symbol, an allegory of an entire world (Mélon 1998: 197). One might argue that, as with subsequent similar films depicting binary universes such as Jean Renoir's *La Règle du jeu* (*The Rules of the Game*, 1939) or Robert Altman's *Gosford Park* (2001), in which crosscutting alternates significant scenes from upper and lower classes, in *Gribiche* the dynamic editing legitimises the hero's craving for a different world.

LES NOUVEAUX MESSIEURS

Les Nouveaux Messieurs is a sprightly comedy which was initially banned for its disrespectful treatment of the Chamber of Deputies. Similar in tone to René Clair's *Un Chapeau de paille d'Italie* (*The Italian Straw Hat*, 1928) and adapted from a successful boulevard comedy by Robert de Flers and Francis de Croiset, it was scripted by Charles Spaak. The storyline does not focus on the inner turmoil, on the dreams and musings of a young hero, as did the two previous films. It mercilessly derides the flaws of rival French politicians in a mixture of witty satirical comedy and sexual farce. Lenny Borger briefly sketches the plot as a 'tug of war and a complicated albeit perverse love affair around a pretty actress/ballerina by two men, an aging aristocrat and a young left-wing electrician briefly appointed Labor Minister' (Borger 2013: 6) The aspiring ballerina will eventually opt for the ageing politician for material reasons, an unusual decision for the time, all the more so because the film features explicit love scenes with the younger lover.

The film's all-encompassing opening scenes skilfully cover a busy morning at the Opera House. They prove to what extent Feyder was fascinated by a location's potential to showcase musical universes and by their capacity to shape new cinematic experiments, such as the musical moments I have been discussing. Pupils in ballet shoes are framed via sophisticated inserts, revealing a band playing, a chorus line led by its conductor, a piano, a ballet number with young ballerinas taught by an

elder teacher. They are perfectly synchronised with what appears to be a ballet of extreme high and low camera angles, astutely framed by Georges Périnal's extraordinarily mobile camera (Vezyroglou 1998: 123).

The most striking example of a musical moment as emotional catalyst occurs during a political event set up by the union organiser Jacques Gaillard (Albert Préjean). His girlfriend Suzanne Verrier (Gaby Morlay) encourages him to be politically assertive and takes the floor. At the same moment, Feyder provides the audience with a provocative double-bind dialogue line from an opponent. The line reads: 'Qui n'entend qu'une cloche n'entend qu'un son', meaning 'Who only hears one bell only hears one sound'. Responding to this 'invitation', Suzanne instantly activates a mechanical organ. We understand that music literally fills the room, as everybody starts singing, humming and dancing in a syncopated rhythm, thus drowning the speech of the political contender.

In a further twist, Feyder superimposes images of a variety of instruments over the shot featuring the mechanical organ and its rolls. This diegetic musical moment that could be labelled as external subception has a double impact on the audience: it foregrounds the importance of experiencing music as an act of empowerment on the part of the characters. Moreover, it stresses the *deferred analogy*, the musical time lag between what is performed and experienced by the entire community and what emotionally 'belongs' only to Suzanne and Jacques.

With no other explanation, the previously commented collective line of action abruptly shifts to the subjective inner sphere of one of the ageing politicians in an openly oneiric sequence; it is reminiscent of those proposed by Feyder's contemporary René Clair in his pioneering *Entr'acte* (1924). The scene unveils the mental space of Monsieur de Courcieux, an opera subscriber. He is seen dozing off and dreaming of ballet dancers in tutus invading the Palais Bourbon hemicycle by means of pioneering superimposed flashes and dissolves that anticipate Busby Berkeley's flamboyant production numbers from early 1930s Hollywood musicals (see Fig. 4.3).

This musical moment is complex in theoretical terms. In his survey *Cinepoetry: Imaginary Cinemas in French Poetry* Christophe Wall-Romana notes that the French poet Stéphane Mallarmé, who had seen Loïe Fuller's serpentine dance at the Folies-Bergères in 1895, was struck by the fact that the ballet's 'allegory' relies on the efficacy of kinaesthetic transference from the dancer's body to the spectator's affective and



Fig. 4.3 *Les Nouveaux Messieurs*: de Courcieux's musical dream of ballet dancers invading the hemicycle (Courtesy of Flicker Alley)

aesthetic response (2013: 67). This is also the case here: the hemicycle dream sequence actually activates both internal and external subception.

The orchestration of affect in *Les Nouveaux Messieurs* is not only determined by the viewer's allegiance with a particular character, but also orchestrated by the narration, which provides the viewer with superior knowledge or engages a temporary ironic perspective on what the characters are doing (Plantinga 2013: 109). Thus, Feyder conceives another extremely dynamic collective scene revealing the Suzanne/Jacques couple dancing to a three-measure waltz rhythm. Mothers are even seen abandoning their newborn babies so as to join the collective dance. This distancing disrupts the emotional intensity of musical moments, which focus on inner thoughts, dreams or musings, thus providing the audience with a variety of unusual diegetic occurrences.

CONCLUSION

In the three analysed films, Feyder chooses musical moments to illustrate essential steps in the narrative of his films and almost simultaneously builds up an alliance between the effective nature of visuals and the affective bond musical occurrences create between characters and viewers. Music, either played, sung or performed to accompany popular dances or imaginary ballet performances (*Les Nouveaux Messieurs*) is not only, as Nietzsche feared in his comments on musical transportation, tied to carrying the dramatic situation; it is experienced both by characters, such as Jean in *Visages d'enfants* or in *Gribiche* (internally) and by the audience (externally) as an essential narrative and emotional paradigm, by means of subliminal auditive perception.

In an essay published for the *Empirical Musicology Review*, 'Seeing Music? What musicians need to know about vision' Michael Schutz rightly argues:

Visual information can influence the perception of auditory information and the way sound is cognitively evaluated. [...] Expressive intentions related to sounds and based on gestures can offer more information than actual musical performances. The rating of the structural and emotional properties related to ballet choreography showed that emotional properties shared strong similarities whether they were performed by participants hearing only the music, viewing only the dance or both hearing the music and viewing the dance. (2008: 98)

This 'affective' parameter was at the core of numerous theoretical debates in France during the 1920s, most importantly the debates on 'musicalism' and filmic emotions, between rhythm and feeling. Paul Romain suggests that 'rhythm and feeling should stick to a two-fold synchronicity' (Guido 2002: 68). Feyder's carefully crafted balance between narration, affect and musicality leads to intense musical moments where the sight of characters engaging in musical activities such as dancing or singing, whether these are in the real world or merely dreamt, creates musicalised sites of emotion.

Working on Feyder's perfect film balance between narration, affect and musicality, inevitably brings forth similitudes with a literary source: in film, as in literature, emotion appears as a catalyst between the reproducibility of the material form and the seeming etherealness of the aesthetic experience. While remembering a pivotal musical moment, Marcel Proust's

opening lines from the cult classic *Du côté de Guermantes* (*The Guermantes Way*) read⁴:

In other words, we had moved. Certainly the servants had made no less noise in the attics of our old home; but she knew them, she had made of their comings and goings familiar events. Now she faced even silence with a strained attention. And as our new neighbourhood appeared to be as quiet as the boulevard on to which we had hitherto looked had been noisy, the song (distinct at a distance, when it was still quite faint, like an orchestral motif) of a passer-by brought tears to the eyes of Françoise in exile (Proust 1996: 2).

NOTES

1. DVD editions: *Visages d'enfants* (1923), Lobster Films, ed. Serge Bromberg, 2015 with Cinémathèque Française, Eye Amsterdam and Cinémathèque Suisse as partners in restoration, score by Antonio Coppola and Octuor de France; *Gribiche* (1925) & *Les Nouveaux Messieurs* (1928) as part of *French Masterworks: Russian Emigrés in Paris 1923–1928*, scores by Rodney Sauer & Mont Alto Motion Picture Orchestra and respectively Antonio Coppola and Octuor de France, David Shepard and Jeffrey Masino, eds. Flicker Alley, 2013, digitally restored by the Cinémathèque Française and Film Preservation Associates.
2. Three other scores have been composed to accompany restored versions of Feyder films, but only Antonio Coppola's is available on the restored DVD versions. The score composed by Coppola does not really match the visuals. Charles Janko, a Dutch composer who also specialised in silent film scores, composed one with the Octuor de France (including percussions and piano) and almost at the same time Dirk Brosse composed another one in Ghent for the first presentation of the restored version in 1988.
3. The score for the DVD/restored version of *Gribiche*, released in 2013, belongs to Rodney Sauer: his technique consists in drawing from pieces from various collections, including popular tunes of the day and music by silent-movie composers whose pieces were sold in photoplay music catalogues. Compiling each score, he tries to support each scene emotionally with music while also keeping in mind the entire arc of the film. However, as was the case with Coppola's score for *Visages d'enfants*, Sauer's compilation score does not take over the three-count waltz *bal musette* rhythm the audience watches onscreen, or the four-count fox trot. Neither does the arranged score reproduce the small jazz band diegetically visualised in breathtaking low angle shots.

4. As a matter of fact, Jean-Paul Sartre also isolates music as having a unique relation to time and space. His childhood memories—which Gillian Anderson also takes over in her survey on the accompaniment practices in silent film—directly relate to the silent film medium and its relation to music and emotions: ‘On rainy days [...] at the last moment, we would decide to go to the movies [...]. Above all I liked the incurable muteness of my heroes. But no, they weren’t mute, since they knew how to make themselves understood. We communicated by means of music: it was the sound of their inner life’ (Anderson 1988: xv).

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The Rhythm of the Night: Abstraction and Sexuality as Destabilisers in Austrian Silent Cinema

Claus Tieber

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I investigate how the notions of abstraction and sexuality in musical numbers of Austrian silent films can be read as destabilising agents of the films' narratives and ideologies. The first case study, *Seine Hoheit, der Eintänzer* (*His Highness, the Gigolo*, 1927), serves to demonstrate how the editing, montage, and camera movements of a dance performance can lead to an abstract visual style that articulates the social anxiety of the post-war period in an otherwise conventionally shot film. My second analysis of the musical moments in the film *Ein Walzertraum* (*A Waltz Dream*, 1925) shows equally how the waltz in its use as a proxy for sexuality and erotic encounters, destabilises the form and narrative of the film by transposing musical features onto the filmic language. Two

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ostensibly opposing images of the city of Vienna form the background for these two case studies: Vienna as the nostalgic screen incarnation of the schmaltzy waltz dream and Vienna as the centre of social and moral decay during the hyperinflation of the 1920s. Both films contain musical numbers and dance numbers, whose sexual subtexts—especially regarding the waltz—become amplified through the ways in which the musical moments are visually stylised. Connected with this topic, but ultimately a separate issue, is the display of the performativity of gender roles in many of these numbers. Witnessing these phenomena at work in (Austrian) silent cinema emphasises the importance of studying these films as models for the bombastic musical spectacles of the early sound film, while reminding us that musical moments were essential elements of silent cinema.

Two closely connected aesthetic tendencies can be detected within the musical numbers in the two discussed films: (1) a dissolve into abstraction in general and ornament specifically and (2) the implied sexual connotations of music visualised as song and dance scenes. These tendencies can be found in many musical numbers in (Western) cinema in the late 1920s and early 30s, but this chapter outlines a specific tendency that emerged in Austrian cinema, owing to a particular cultural environment in Vienna during the 1920s.

To clarify some of the terminology used in this chapter, I consider ‘musical numbers’ as an umbrella term for song and dance scenes in a fictional film in contrast to ‘musical moments’, a term theorised by Amy Herzog to represent scenes in which the image-sound hierarchy of classical cinema is subverted, and the filmic style usually changes. Drawing on the work of Herzog and her post-structuralist, Deleuzian approach, we can see specific characteristics and differences in the visual mode of representation during musical moments in these films. Such moments in which ‘the music takes over’ are free from the tasks of narration and realistic representation and can be used to create independent and subversive structures, especially within song and dance scenes, but also in shorter instances (see Herzog 2010). Applying the theoretical notion of the ‘musical moment’ allows us to detect musical scenes in silent films even without knowledge about their live accompaniment. Not all instances of music in silent films are fully developed musical numbers as we have come to know them from sound films. However, as this chapter aims to show, silent films do include, often to great effect, musical moments despite the

lack of a technically synchronised soundtrack and thus without the guarantee of a standardised musical accompaniment. In fact, in many cases it is difficult to ascertain which music was played in cinemas to accompany these numbers. This variety of possible musical accompaniments in the films' exhibition meant that some musical moments only emerged in specific screenings (of the same film).

If we take the 'visual variations' and significant changes in film style during a musical moment as a starting point, we could argue that such scenes do indeed offer the possibility to be read differently than the rest of the film. In this sense, the notion of the musical moment as discussed by Herzog can help identify and analyse early examples of musical numbers in silent cinema, even for short moments that nevertheless feature basic characteristics of musical numbers.

The musical moment, Herzog writes, is 'at once one of the most conservative and the most irreverent filmic phenomena' (Herzog 2010: 8). It is a convention in itself, it repeats the structure and the ideological order of the film and is able to perpetuate hierarchies regarding race, class, and gender. But at the same time, musical moments are 'open to the interventions of difference' (Herzog 2010: 8). Free from the task of narration and representational repetition, they create their own musical patterns and refrains, and can thus be subversive and destabilise the established form and ideology of a film. The term 'refrain' is taken from Deleuze and Guattari (see Deleuze and Guattari 2004: 361ff), and not used in the traditional, musical sense, but metaphorically. Herzog describes the term as follows: 'The refrain is an act of expression, any act of expression, that creates rhythm and difference between milieus' (Herzog 2010: 82). Milieu, another term by Deleuze/Guattari, is not used in its common meaning but defined as 'coded blocks of space-time' (Bogue 2003 quoted by Herzog 2010: 81). The relation between refrain, milieu, and what Deleuze/Guattari call 'territory' are complex as Herzog explains: 'A refrain in film is an expressive element [...] that serves to mark out a territory, or may even dismantle and take flight from those territories and boundaries' (Herzog 2010: 82).

The notion of deterritorialisation is crucial for Deleuze/Guattari's view of music and their terminology as Herzog explains:

Territories are formed when the codes that have certain functional qualities within one milieu are transcoded—decontextualized, or deterritorialized,

in effect—such that they take on new qualitative or expressive qualities, qualities that allow them to mark out new ground. (Herzog 2010: 81)

Ronald Bogue further discusses the concept deterritorialisation:

The process through which a refrain is deterritorialized is essentially one of *becoming*, a becoming-woman, a becoming-child, a becoming-animal or a becoming-molecular, a passage *between* milieus and territories that articulates the nonpulsed rhythms of an unmeasured time. (Bogue 2003: 23f)

Applied to my case studies, we could infer that musical moments in film are the start of the process of film—moving images—becoming music, not visualised music, not transferring or translating music into visuals, but morphing and deterritorialising. The musical moment creates a foreign body within the film it inhabits—with the potential to undermine and destabilise it. In short, musical moments disturb, subvert, and destabilise the form, structure, and sometimes the ideology of the film in which they appear. They can create new ground or territory by appearing in spaces and times where they are not ‘supposed to be’. An avant-garde film style can pop up in the middle of a classical Hollywood film, for example. These moments are not always easy to grasp and to describe. Their fascination lies in their subversive effect as well as in their tendency to ‘take flight’.

AUSTRIAN SILENT CINEMA’S SEXUAL MOMENTS

The musical moments I shall discuss in this chapter are drawn from Austrian silent cinema. These moments are characterised by their tendency towards abstraction as well as their sexual undertones, and the destabilising effect of these musical moments is partly determined by the historical context. Following centuries as a dominant, multi-cultural superpower, Austria became a small, democratically-ruled republic after the disintegration of the Austrian-Hungarian monarchy during World War I. Political structures and institutions were fragile, as were traditional beliefs in gender roles, sexuality, nation, religion, and class. The destabilisation and rupture of film form through musical moments reflects these uncertainties in Austrian society of the interwar period.

In order to understand the importance of sexual subtexts in Austrian silent cinema, it is essential to point out certain particularities about

Austria's film history compared to international (western) developments. Although the exhibition of films in Vienna started at the same time as in other European cities, the first Austrian films were not produced until 1906 when the company Saturn Film, a company specialising in nude pictures, issued their short films for so-called *pikante Herrenabende* (piquant gentlemen's evenings). It is perhaps no coincidence that Austrian film production started with short pornographic films, feeding into the stereotypical image of Vienna as a hedonistic city in which men live according to the credo 'Wein, Weib und Gesang' (Wine, Women, and Song), a theme that the national film industry drew on recurrently. In addition, another influential factor for the production of films was the industry's strong relationship with the Viennese operetta, a musical theatre genre whose works were ripe with more or less hidden sexual subtexts and which constantly outsmarted censorship through its use of the waltz as a substitute for sexual encounters. As Rick Altman puts it: 'Part of the charm of Viennese operetta had always been its willingness to deal openly with society's favorite topic—sex' (Altman 1987: 140). Viennese operetta was an ideal model and fruitful source for the new medium; it delivered narratives that were easier to summarise than those of the legitimate stage and a large part of the audience was familiar with the plots of the many successful operettas. Apart from the familiar stories, operetta further offered the images with which to tell them, character-types, stars as performers, and, above all, popularity (see Bono 1998: 32). Austrian silent cinema's close connection to operetta can be considered the main reason for two aspects that became highly relevant for musical moments in film: sexual subplots (or forms of sublimated sexuality) and a considerable degree of self-reflexivity (see among others Bono 1998; Klotz 1991; Tieber and Wintersteller 2020).

Although the genre of the Viennese film (Wien Film) is generally said to begin in 1933 with *Leise flehen meine Lieder* (*Gently My Songs Entreat*), Vienna and its cultural and musical histories were the topic of many Austrian and German films of the silent and early sound period. The comparatively late start of Austria's national film production, the film industry's close connection to Germany and—perhaps the most important point—a reciprocal and often symbiotic relationship between cinema and operetta, characterise the output of Austrian silent and early sound cinema. This cultural tradition and the intermedial connections created a fertile environment for musical moments in films. The musical form that is the basis of every Viennese operetta exemplifies the sexual subtext: the

waltz. To quote Rick Altman again: ‘To dance is to love’ (Altman 1987: 136).

ABSTRACTION AND SEXUALITY

Very often, sexual connotations in musical moments of Austrian silent films are connected with the other characteristic I mentioned at the outset of this chapter: a tendency towards abstraction. The integration of a musical number can change the visual style of a film, thus subverting the modes of representation, inverting the sound-image hierarchy, and creating what Steven Pustay calls ‘visual-music’ (2015: 173). Busby Berkeley’s visually elaborate production numbers are the most famous examples for this tendency in cinema. But even before Berkeley, comparable solutions to visualise music cinematically were found around the world. Drawing on Deleuze’s terminology, Pustay refers to this transformational process from film to visual music as ‘becoming music’ (2015: 181).

Within this process the mode of representation in the film changes and can create abstract and ornamental images. As a further visual distinction, I use the term ‘ornament’ to describe small, repeating patterns as a specific form of abstraction. Historically speaking, ornamentalism is closely connected to sexuality. In 1908, early twentieth-century Austrian theorist and architect Adolf Loos, penned the manifesto ‘Ornament and Crime’, in which he wrote: ‘The urge to ornament one’s face and everything else within reach, is the origin of visual arts. It is the babbling of the arts. All art is erotic’.¹ (Loos 1908, n.p.) Loos regarded ornamentalism as a pre-form of art, motivated by sexual energy. The association of ornament and sexuality is also reflected in Siegfried Kracauer’s writings who was a fierce critic of Berkeley’s film musical extravaganzas, as well as of the German cinema’s versions, exemplified by the British show dance group Tiller Girls. Observing the close connection of ornament and sexuality, in Kracauer’s reading the ornamentalised musical numbers of the Tiller Girls represented merely a ‘plastic expression of erotic life’ (Kracauer 1995: 76). He remarked: ‘The mass movements of the girls, by contrast, take place in a vacuum; they are a linear system that no longer has any erotic meaning’ (1995: 76f). For Kracauer the abstractness of the musical number can be related to the capitalist system that generated these products of mass consumption. Pustay interprets the ornamentalist numbers of Berkeley in a similar way, although he reaches a different conclusion.

For him, these numbers ‘reveal the strong sexuality inherent within the sonic patterns that structure his cinematic spectacles’ (Pustay 2015: 173). The abstract visualisation of the music, Pustay argues, exposes the music’s underlying sexual energy: ‘Bodies in motion that expand and contract, break apart and restructure, undulate, dilate, and rotate, become concrete objects and dissolve into abstract patterns, all held together by movement and rhythm’ (Pustay 2015: 180). He sums up: ‘The visual-body of the film takes up musical forms rather than the music imitating the image’ (Pustay 2015: 181). It is in these moments that the music ‘takes over’, as we shall see in my two case studies.

SEINE HOHEIT, DER EINTÄNZER

One of the most interesting musical numbers in Austrian silent cinema can be found in *Seine Hoheit, der Eintänzer* a.k.a. *Das entfesselte Wien* (*Vienna Unleashed*). The film was written by Walter Reisch, who is known for the invention of the Viennese Film as a genre, together with actor-director Willi Forst. Reisch famously integrated a lot of music in his screenplays, both in silent and sound films (see Tieber and Wintersteller 2020). The film’s female lead is played by Czech actress Anny Ondra, who later worked with Alfred Hitchcock (i.a. *Blackmail*, 1929). The film takes place after the fall of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The aristocratic class is impoverished and some of its members are forced to work in degrading jobs to make a living.

The location of the sequences I shall analyse is the fictional nightclub Grand Café Parisien, clearly modelled on the famous Parisian clubs Moulin Rouge and Folies Bergère. The whole film is more or less shot and edited in a classical, traditional manner and without characteristic features or signs of auteurism in terms of style. This changes abruptly, however, with the musical numbers in question. The nightclub sequences, which occur in the middle of the film, consist of three short parts, including a short introduction, in which we see (1) a jazz band in radically fast editing, (2) a dance number by a half-naked woman whose entrance onto the stage is significantly mirrored by the male protagonist later on, and finally (3) a song-and-dance number by a female performer accompanied by chorus girls. The beginning of this sequence is marked by an intertitle that introduces the audience to the Grand Café. A very hectic and quick montage of close-ups and medium shots then shows the members of a jazz band; the camera is deliberately moving and shaking. A shot

of the entire band—a delayed establishing shot—appears only after the rapid montage. The scene bears all the relevant characteristics of a musical moment à la Herzog: even if we do not know which music was played for the various screenings of this film, it is obvious that the camera position and movement, the editing and the whole filmic style are now determined by the implied music and not the other way around. The film manages successfully to represent a still relatively novel type of music at the time, namely jazz, as fast, hectic, and rhythmic. The visuals communicate clearly how jazz was viewed, and the sudden change in film style articulates the radical break with hearing traditions this music must have entailed in mid-1920s Vienna.

The band portrayed in the film—consisting of saxophone, tuba, banjo, drums, and piano—was a typical depiction of a jazz band, but not necessarily something that could be heard in a Viennese cinema.

After the brief montage that opens the sequence, the camera reveals the interior of the nightclub. The place is depicted as the dark side of modern life, the underbelly of bourgeois society. Everything that is novel and that might trigger anxieties in the (male) bourgeois—and in this case also aristocratic—class, converges in this nightclub: changing gender roles, erotic display of (female) bodies, drugs, and modern music.

After this short exposition, a half-naked woman enters the room and starts to dance. An intertitle informs us that the name of the dancer is Diana Manetta. Diana is presented as a real person and after her dance performance, she does not appear in the rest of the film. The dance number is filmed in wide shots from relatively far away; the camera seems to shy away from the half-naked dancer. The dance is intercut with reaction shots of men gazing lustfully and grotesquely at the dancer. This unambiguity of the sexes and their social division into empowered, heterosexual, male spectator, and objectified, passive woman sets up the context for the third and last part of the sequence, the musical number in which the gender binary is subverted. But before the nightclub guests get to witness the much-anticipated musical number, the male protagonist, Prince Otto, enters the stage of the nightclub. The female audience members gaze at him in a similar fashion to the way the men stared at the half-naked woman in the previous scene. After the fall of the monarchy, even a Prince is exposed to the female gaze just like a female dancer is exposed to the male gaze. The whole sequence is structured in a dualistic and almost symmetrical manner, akin to how Altman (1987: 28ff) describes the overall structure of film musicals. The entrance of the Prince

is the only part of the sequence in which music is not visually foregrounded. This changes once Otto starts to dance with one of the female guests. During the last, short part of this dance, the camera shows only the moving feet of the dancers, which imply the rhythm of the music.

The third part of the nightclub sequence follows a little later after the storyline continues outside the nightclub. Back in the Café Parisien, the evening's main number starts with a wide shot of the band. A dozen women dressed in lingerie and with flowers in their hands prance onto the stage. The camera switches to a bird's eye perspective (never seen before in this film), creating ornamental forms à la Busby Berkeley (see Fig. 5.1). The dance rhythm slows down and Steffie (Anny Ondra) enters. She is wearing a top hat, a monocle, and a tuxedo jacket; she is cross-dressing except for very short pants and high heels, mixing male and female signs in her costume as well as in her behaviour. Before the dancers and Steffie leave the stage, she kisses one of the girls, cementing the depiction of the space as amoral and sinful.

This musical moment, in which again all visual elements follow the (rhythm of the) music, is rather short for a song number (only 90 seconds). Present-day audiences might even overlook that this is a song and not just a dance number. Yet this triptych of small musical moments (jazz band, naked dancer, and song number) is put into a clear dualist and symmetrical structure that constantly highlights the binaries in the construction of gender, class, and space. The highlight of the whole sequence is the song, which includes everything that characterises a musical moment. The elements relevant to this musical number may be brief and underdeveloped, but nevertheless, some tendencies can be clearly detected: the overall theme of the sequence highlights sexuality combined with changed gender roles and indecency after World War I. The nightclub functions as a space representing the absence of the old order, and the new reality is unstable and precarious. A naked female dancer signifies moral decay, while a former aristocrat dancing for money points to the elimination of class boundaries and social hierarchies. A shocking new music serves as the soundtrack for this new space. The filmic representation emphasises the erotic and sexual contents of the scene with brief moments where the realistic images shift into abstraction during the rapidly edited band montage, the top shots of the chorus dancers, and an 'unchained' camera.²

Comparable scenes can be found in a number of European and American films (e.g. *Das Spielzeug von Paris* (*Red Heels*, 1925) and *So this is*

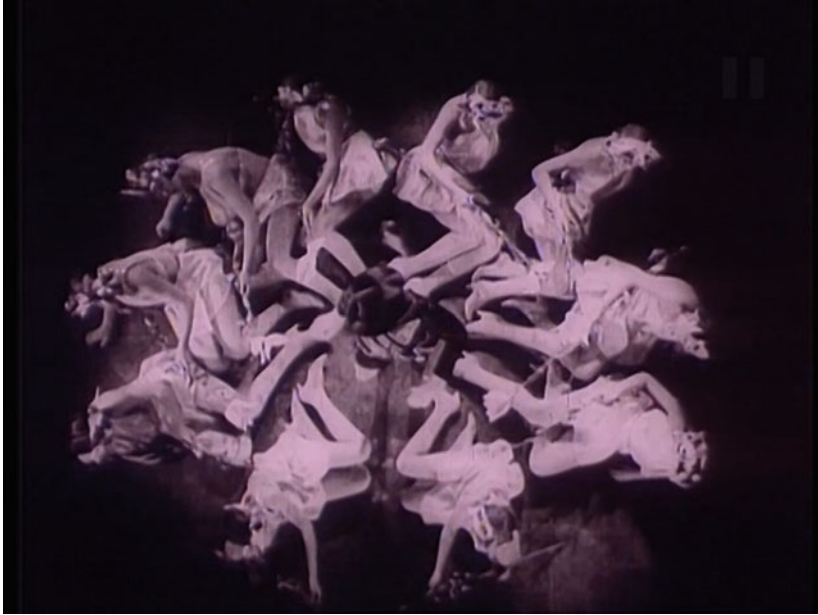


Fig. 5.1 Ornament and sexuality in *Seine Hoheit der Eintänzer* (1927) (Courtesy of Filmarchiv Austria)

Paris, 1926). When the filmic representation of music tends to abstraction, the resulting ‘visual music’ is often connoted with sexuality. The reason lies in the nature of music itself: it is at once abstract and sexual. As Elizabeth Grosz writes in her book *Chaos, Territory, Art: Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth*: ‘There is an obvious but indirect link between the enjoyment of music (whether performing, participating, or simply listening) and sexual or erotic pleasure’ (Grosz 2012: 27). One way of visualising music during a musical number is to create rhythmically moving, changing, and dancing bodies and forms. The link between music and sexual or erotic pleasure, as Grosz argues, allows us to read organised bodies along these lines. It is also a way to represent sexual energy in the context of socially conservative conventions and strict legal frameworks like censorship.

Starting from an analysis of Esther Williams’ films, Herzog reflects on the relation between the female body and the ornament in these (and

other films): ‘Femininity is exposed as conflicted and performative, a masquerade that can be adopted at will’ (Herzog 2010: 176) The female singer in *Seine Hoheit, der Eintänzer* performs a male identity, although she can clearly be identified as a woman. The film thus undermines and subverts binary gender norms and emphasises the performativity of gender.

Herzog continues to sum up the ornaments in the musical water spectacles of Esther Williams:

The Berkeleysque spectacle obscures the distinction between motion and stillness, surface and depth, object and living being. Space, time, and scale are unhinged from an axis of linear causality and become a playground for free associations. The female form in the musical spectacle is a sheer surface, an abstraction and an empty mask. The gestures it offers are decidedly contradictory, appearing to be obsessed with the female body as a sexual object yet eradicating any sensuality or eroticism through abstraction. (Herzog 2010: 176)

The abstraction of the female body may eliminate their eroticism, according to Kracauer, but the process of ‘becoming music’, the transformation of narrative film into visual music, is itself sexual according to Pustay’s argument as discussed above. Comparable phenomena can be found in another silent film: Ludwig Berger’s *Ein Walzertraum*.

EIN WALZERTRAUM

The 1925 film version of the operetta *Ein Walzertraum* offers a different example of how music inspired the creation of abstract filmic forms despite its absence in a silent film. Officially a German production, *Ein Walzertraum* features music, a setting and an overall topic that are unmistakably Viennese; more precisely, the film adapts the Viennese operetta of the same name by Austrian composer Oscar Strauss. The international ensemble consists of German, Austrian, and Eastern European actors and actresses.

The operetta *Ein Walzertraum* premiered in 1907 at the Carltheater in Vienna and had a very successful first run. Not long after the premiere, some arias and duets from the operetta were turned into ‘*Tonbilder*’, short films that were synchronised with music using gramophone records. The sheer number of these *Tonbilder*—around 20—reveals the success and

popularity of the operetta in Austria and Germany.³ After the work's first feature film adaptation in 1925, Ernst Lubitsch's based his *Smiling Lieutenant* (1931) on the operetta, which even included additional music by Oscar Strauss himself.

The film plays with the dualism of German and Austrian/Viennese clichés, which allows it to construct Vienna as an imaginary city, living in its own mythical past. The city is strongly connected to the themes of music and love. Since the heydays of the Viennese operetta and up until the *Schlager* and *Heimatfilme* of the 1950s, Vienna—much like Paris—was represented as a frivolous city. *Ein Walzertraum* is an early example for portraying the former capital of the Habsburg Monarchy in a specific fairy tale-like way that became highly popular with the genre of the Viennese film, cemented by Walter Reisch and Willi Forst with their first collaboration *Leise flehen meine Lieder*, a film about the love affairs of Franz Schubert. One of the most typical spaces shown in many Viennese films is a *Heurigen*, a wine tavern where people come together to drink, eat their (own) food, and sing to the music—all under the open skies of Vienna. The space of the *Heurigen* is significant in depictions of turn-of-the-century Vienna as a hedonistic city, and it is also the location relevant to my analysis of the musical moments in this film, albeit that the second musical moment takes place in a beer garden, the German version of a *Heurigen*.

The story takes place in the fictional, but unmistakably German monarchy of Flausenthurn (*Flausen* means 'silly ideas'). Count Eberhardt XXIII wants his daughter, Princess Alix, to marry the elderly Prince Peter Ferdinand. Alix, however, is attracted to his adjutant, Nikolaus Count Preyn, nicknamed 'Nux'. Nux is a happy-go-lucky man, who flirts with Franzi, the violinist and conductor of a Viennese female salon orchestra. After seeing this, the German Princess Alix wants to become more 'Viennese', so that Nux might fall in love with her. Nux shows the German princess the Viennese way of life. They stroll through the city, past the statue of Johann Strauß Jr., the Waltz King, and take a *Fiaker*—a horse-drawn carriage—to a *Heurigen*. 'To the Heurigen? What's that?' reads an intertitle. Alix then takes lessons in 'Vienneseness' with Franzi and after some misunderstandings and conflicts the couple find their happy ending.

At the *Heurigen* couples flirt and dance; old and young folk, Viennese people and foreigners become integrated into a singing, dancing, and drinking community. The tavern is presented as a utopian place in which differences and opposites are exposed and suspended with the help

of music and alcohol. After the filmic introduction of this important cinematic space, which bears elements of a musical moment in its first shots of a *Schrammel* band,⁴ the couple arrives. An unknown woman approaches their table, praises Nux and his charm ('Nux has got it!') and starts drinking with them. The two musicians that introduced the sequence are now seen singing again and the intertitle reads: 'See, that's Viennese, holladeroh!'

The combination of alcohol, music, and promiscuous women is here presented as typically Viennese. The scene closes with Nux sitting between two women, singing, a frivolous *ménage à trois*, the visitors of the *Heurigen* clapping their hands to the beat of the music. Nux asks the princess for a dance, explaining: 'A Waltz, your Highness, the most beautiful thing in Vienna'. Alix is obviously not very good at waltzing, disturbs the other dancers, is also a little drunk and finally rests her head on Nux's shoulder upon which he kisses her. Alcohol, music, and dance have worked their magic. 'What was that?' she asks him deliriously. 'See, that was Viennese!' he answers sheepishly.

This scene introduces the connotation of waltz and sexuality. The waltz leads to a kiss, the kiss then leads to marriage. The waltz is presented as 'an expression of erotic desire' Alexandra Seibel writes (2017: 273). Altman states that the cliché 'to dance is to love' was born with Franz Lehár's operetta *The Merry Widow* (1905) and it is clearly implied in this scene. The film uses the waltz as a surrogate for sex, or, as Seibel again puts it: 'Once the woman is willing to waltz, she indicates her consent for the sexual encounter' (2017: 280). What Nancy Schwartz notes about Lubitsch's adaptation of *The Merry Widow* (1934) also applies to *Ein Walzertraum*:

All of this erotic tension is beautifully translated into the metaphor of the waltz, which becomes the ultimate, perfect vision of surrogate sex, coupling without consummation: the couples in an embrace, whirling around in circles within circles, generating a dizzying energy that mounts and mounts in exhilaration. If the film wasn't censored more than it seems to have been, it is because the Hays Office didn't understand the meaning of the waltz. (Schwartz 1975: 13)

This *Heurigen* scene represents Nux's Vienna, his cultural and social environment. Only the beginning of the scene and the waltz itself can be considered types of musical moments, yet the whole sequence works as

the utopian ideal, which will be contrasted with another musical number later in the film. Having danced with and even kissed the Princess, Nux is now 'forced' to marry her, which means he has to leave his beloved Vienna to follow her to Flausenthurn. As the husband of a princess, he also has to submit to her and become her subordinate. The constitution of Flausenthurn says that 'the prince consort is in every aspect under the commanding authority of her Highness!' Alix and Nux's wedding is not the happy ending of the film. In fact, Nux loses interest in Alix and sneaks out during their wedding night. After roaming the streets of Flausenthurn, he finally enters a *Biergarten* (beer garden), in which a Viennese ladies' orchestra called 'Die Donaunixen' (The Danube's Mermaids) led by Franzi as a *Stehgeiger* (standing violinist) is performing waltzes. The film then cuts to the lonely princess in the castle; 'Viennese love music! You have to play something for him!' she is told by Franzi. The double sense of the German word *vorspielen* is stronger than in English; it means both to perform something and to deceive someone. Cut back to Nux in the beer garden who scribbles his musical request for the orchestra on a beer mat: 'Geschichten aus dem Wiener Wald' ('Tales from the Vienna Woods'), the famous waltz by Johann Strauß, Jr. Franzi, the orchestra's violinist, first reads the wrong side of the beer mat: 'Only beer can give German love and German strength'. The Viennese violinist and her female musicians laugh about the unsophisticated slogan. Nux's request is on the other side of the mat. The film once more plays with the oppositions between German and Austrian/Viennese culture. The sexual subtext of the phrase is hardly to be ignored—its praise of male sexual potency is salient.

The orchestra starts to play the requested waltz upon which the film's style changes. The location of the Vienna Woods is connected with a nostalgic utopia, a male version of free sexuality. The musical number that follows is a visualisation of Nux's longing dreams of the Vienna Woods. Cross-fades and double exposures dominate the visual style of the scene. Franzi is depicted as 'larger than life', alternating with scantily dressed girls dancing through the Vienna Woods, reminiscent of nymphs from fairy tales. In a parallel montage, the film cuts back and forth between the princesses inside the castle now practising the piano and Nux dreaming of Viennese girls in the woods. The camera then pans away from Nux and changes to a bird's eye perspective. Flowers are raining down on him, the whole picture climaxes into abstract forms that rhythmically form

kaleidoscopic shapes. The number ends with Nux fondly gazing at Franzi, the Viennese violinist.

The visual refrain of this number, to use Pustay's terminology, is dominated by abstract forms, dissolves, cross-fades and double exposures. This tendency towards abstraction significantly differs from the rest of the film. The famous waltz—in this case we know which music was played at least at the film's premiere and likely in many subsequent showings—sets the rhythm to the musical refrain of the number.

The difference between this number and the realistic part of the film is of course motivated by the circumstance that the number represents a dream. One might argue, drawing on Deleuze, that every number in a film musical is a dream number (see Deleuze 2013: 63ff). On the other hand, as Pustay writes, most musical numbers are 'not structured like a dream, they are structured like music' (2015: 178). Musical structure and form, Pustay continues, resemble sexuality. Drawing on Grosz's work (2012), he argues that Berkeley's choreographies 'actively reveal [...] how music, just as the natural sound from which it springs, is fundamentally "sexual in nature". [...] Music connects the human animal to the sexuality of the natural world, in turn providing assemblages between the body and the vibrations of the cosmos' (2015: 182). He further notes that this connection of musical structure, rhythm and vibrations to sexuality is made visible in the musical numbers of Berkeley.

In the case of *Ein Walzertraum*, produced at a time when Berkeley was still working as a choreographer on Broadway, sexuality is not only connected to the structure of musical moments, but also to the settings and traditions of Viennese music. Everything in this film points towards sexuality (dancing, intoxication, the ironic reference to impotence), based upon Viennese stereotypes that connect music, waltz, and sexuality. In this type of 'sexualised environment', abstract film images are merely a different way to represent music and its connoted meanings.

Musical numbers are, as Herzog writes, 'freed, at least to a certain degree, from the burden of signification, motivation, and logical development' (2010: 51). Using such abstract images is only possible within a musical number—sometimes marked as a dream—according to the conventions of the fictional feature film. But again, musical moments in which the mode of representation shifts towards the abstract, are 'becoming music'. If we follow Pustay, this visual music is already sexual in its form. In its Viennese variation, these musical moments are already embedded in an implicit erotic context.⁵

CONCLUSION

The theoretical notion of the ‘musical moment’ as an instance in fiction film when the visuals, the camera work, and the editing of a scene are dominated and structured by music, is extremely helpful to determine the specificity of musical moments and numbers in silent cinema. As I hope to have shown in the two case studies, music can function as a trigger to influence, infiltrate, undermine and subvert the organisation of the images as well as the overall structure and ideology of the film. The analysed musical moments reveal tendencies for abstraction that are closely connected with the sexual subtext of the films. These tendencies are intricately bound to the music, its structure, and its meaning: sexuality as a notion that can be described in abstract terms such as rhythm, movement, pauses, and refrains. In the case of Vienna, the waltz and the narrative settings it is connected with, are as sexually charged as the censors allowed them to be. The stereotype of Vienna as a musical city, its *Heurigen* culture and the famed Viennese girls, create the male utopia of a world in which women are willing to dance and more.

Austrian silent cinema contains many solutions for the visualisation of music and the use of musical numbers as more or less sublimated sexuality. The city’s cultural environment in the 1920s was a fertile context for music films that sometimes produced extraordinary musical numbers. Comparable film scenes can be found in American film musicals, in French silent and early sound films, and probably in many more national cinemas. European and American cinema influenced each other from the days the film industry became international in the late nineteenth century. Especially in the 1920s and early 30s, not least because many filmmakers had to flee Europe, this reciprocal impact grew even stronger. Filmmakers were searching for ways to cope with (diegetic) music in film and to create musical numbers, which were viewed as an additional attraction. In this respect, Vienna proved to be a fruitful place for developing various treatments of musical moments in film, due to its cultural history and its theatrical and musical traditions, to paradigmatically display abstraction and sexual subtexts as two significant tendencies of musical numbers at the time. The musical numbers of these films function as destabilisers of the film’s form and sometimes its ideology. An otherwise conventionally narrated film is driven to the fringes of abstraction and avant-garde cinema, gender roles are often displayed as performances that are changing. In the context of a world in which empires collide and

disintegrate, in which established conventions are no longer to be trusted, these musical numbers give a glimpse of a (cinematic) world to come, of a cinema ‘taking flight’ (Herzog 2010: 82) from its boundaries.

NOTES

1. English translation by author; lower case in original.
2. The term ‘unchained camera’ (*entfesselte Kamera*) was used in the late 1920s to describe a free moving camera, its invention is credited to cinematographer Karl Freund.
3. For an example of a *Tonbild* of the duet ‘Da draussen im duftigen Garten’ see <https://www.filmportal.de/video/ein-walzertraum-walzertraum-nr-92-1908> (accessed 15 May 2021).
4. *Schrammel* music is a type of Viennese folk music named after Johann and Josef Schrammel. A Schrammel band or quartet usually consists of two violins, one contra guitar (a.k.a. Schrammel guitar), and a clarinette and/or button harmonica.
5. *Ein Walzertraum* was remade in Hollywood by Ernst Lubitsch in 1931 under the title *The Smiling Lieutenant*. Although the sexual subtext remains strong in Lubitsch’s version, there are no comparable instances of visual abstraction, the musical numbers are presented in less extravagant and stylised ways.

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All Singing! All Talking! All British! Musical Moments in Early British Talkies 1929 to 1932

Laraine Porter

British silent cinema made its transition to sound in the middle of 1929, a year or so behind Hollywood and six months ahead of mainland Europe. Hollywood's sizeable production and distribution interests in Britain enabled American talkies to rapidly dominate British screens, and the arrival of Warner Bros' Al Jolson Musicals *The Jazz Singer* (1927) and *The Singing Fool* (1928) yielded substantial returns for those exhibitors smart enough to convert their cinemas to sound in 1928. Their success also convinced British film producers to wire their studios post haste in the race to get British-made talkies on British screens. However, Jolson's films and those British Musicals that followed were heavily criticised by Britain's intellectual elite. This opprobrium was partly fuelled by a wave of anti-Americanism linked to the post-World War I influx of American film,

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music and culture, but was also tinged with anti-Semitism aimed both at Jolson, himself Jewish, and the Jewish interests on Broadway where his films had originated.¹ But Britain's highbrow and anti-Semitic critics were out of touch with popular tastes and Jolson's British fans turned out en masse to witness his on-screen renditions of popular songs like 'Sonny Boy', 'My Mammy' and 'I'm Sitting on Top of the World' in such numbers that the profits generated helped finance the costly installation of sound equipment in British cinemas. As the new technologies and the aesthetics of synchronised sound amalgamated with the visual language of silent cinema, British producers experimented with inserting popular songs into their talkies.

Using case studies from Britain's first talkies produced between 1929 and 1932, this chapter explores how early 'musical moments'² explored the dramatic potential of music to signify pivotal moments in the plot; to emphasise gender and sexuality and to delineate differences in class and culture through the representation of musical tastes, styles and leit-motifs associated with different characters. It also considers how diegetic and synchronised musical moments allowed actors to temporarily revert to silent modes of mimetic expression, as music liberated them from delivering dialogue into static microphones. The performance of music also created spaces for 'aural spectacle' where the flow of the plot is temporarily halted to accommodate moments of authentic emotional expression that the spoken script could not convey. Film producers too saw the potential of music to forge a recognisable national identity for British films, as distinct from Hollywood and Europe. Commercial opportunities were also exploited by marketing the 'song-from-the-film' through sheet music and gramophone tie-ins.

Theme songs specifically linked to particular films had been played live in cinemas and sold as sheet music from the 1910s. As early as 1913, *The Abyss*, starring Asta Nielsen had a score composed for its erotic 'Gaucho Dance' and the practice of composing memorable songs for popular films increased during the 1920s. Notable examples include 'The Sheik of Araby' composed for *The Sheik* (1921) which capitalised on Rudolph Valentino's mass appeal and became associated with the film thereafter. By 1926, Warner Bros' *Don Juan* was exhibited with a complete music score on Vitaphone discs and Cecil B. De Mille's *Volga Boatmen* had the Russian traditional 'The Song of the Volga Boatmen' released as sheet music for domestic and cinema performances. Full cinema scores for silent films were rare; most were accompanied by a combination of short generic

library pieces and improvisation, though Albert Cazabon's compilation for the British war film *The Flag Lieutenant* (1926) is an exception (see Brand 2002: 217). Live music, sound effects and the occasional choral accompaniment had always been intrinsic to silent cinema, but synchronised sound opened creative possibilities for diegetic music where creative decisions were now taken by producers rather than left to exhibitors and cinema musicians at the point of exhibition.

Writing on the British Musical, John Mundy (2007: 33) describes the 1930s as the 'most musical of decades' as the genre, born with the arrival of sound, quickly established itself. By June 1930, 13 of the 80 British talkies produced were classified as 'Musicals' or 'Revues' (Gifford 1986).³ The historiography of the early British Musical remains patchy and many films are now hard to access. Mundy (2007: 1) ascribes this neglect to the disdainful attitudes of British critics and film music historians like John Huntley who felt that while Britain excelled at the 'serious film score', no British Musical could rival Hollywood (Huntley 1947: 10). Victor Saville, director of several early 1930s Musicals, reflected these attitudes; 'I don't think enough credit has been given to the British musicals of the early Thirties. I say this with modesty—it took nearly 40 years before I could look at my early work' (Saville 1979: 49). Despite his modesty, Saville was mistaken in stating that he directed the first 'musical Musical' in December 1931 with *Sunshine Susie*, a claim easily challenged by Walter Summers' *Raise the Roof* from February 1930 (ibid.: 48). The British Musical certainly flourished throughout the 1930s, accounting for approximately one-fifth of all British productions until 1939 when the genre faded from British production. But we will now turn our attention to the very first musical moments in British talkies from which the 'musical Musical' developed.

MUSICAL MOMENTS BEFORE MUSICALS

The first British Musicals appeared in 1930, but songs were intrinsic to Britain's first talkies from March 1929 with Hitchcock's *Blackmail*, shot in both silent and sound versions at Elstree Studios and released in June. Not all early talkies had successful releases however, and Arthur Maude's *The Clue of the New Pin* (1929) was heralded by *The Bioscope* trade paper as the 'First British All-Talkie' (9 January 1929: 24), but its fate was to be released only as a silent. This was a time of boom and bust for film companies, unsure of which technologies to invest in, unfamiliar with the new

aesthetics of sound and uncertain whether talkies were a short-term fad. In May 1929 alone, eight companies were set up to produce talkies but only one survived into the mid-1930s (Wood 1986: 12). Notwithstanding these setbacks, sound technology stabilised and the transition quickly gathered momentum. Exactly a year after *Blackmail*, Britain produced its last silent feature with *The Woodpigeon Patrol* (June 1930), a boy-scout adventure featuring the movement's founder Robert Baden-Powell.

Much has been written about Hitchcock's creative use of sound in *Blackmail*'s famous breakfast table 'knife scene' where the word 'knife' is repeated and foregrounded to reflect the psychological turmoil of the female protagonist Alice (Annie Ondra), traumatised after recently stabbing her sexual attacker, Crewe (Cyril Ritchard).⁴ But Hitchcock's use of music in the sequence leading up to the attack is also highly significant. Having abandoned her detective boyfriend on a date, Alice goes to Crewe's studio where she dresses in a dancer's costume while he sings 'Miss Up-to-Date' on his piano. The song's lyrics reflect Alice's youthful confidence as she participates in a light-hearted flirtation for which she is soon to be punished. Powrie's concept of the 'crystal-song' is useful here whereby the song serves as a pivot around which the drama takes a new turn (Powrie 2017: 4). Crewe's performance begins playfully upbeat, but takes a sinister turn when he ceases playing to secretly steal Alice's clothes, before reprising the song without the lyrics and aggressively hammering the piano keys. The song's performance is transformative and signals Crewe's sexual intentions, just prior to his attack on Alice. Hitchcock uses the song to prepare the audience for the attack of which Alice is unaware. This second rendition shifts the song's meaning from a representation of female agency, 'Miss-Up-to-Date', into an indicator of aggressively aroused masculine sexuality. Comparing the film's sound and silent versions also reveals how the song's lyrics and its various iterations help construct the drama. In the silent version, Hitchcock builds the tension visually through Crewe's body language and facial expressions; his attack on Alice filmed with a forward tracking shot from his perspective at the piano. Hitchcock drew a link between sex and death with his first 'musical moment' which Sullivan (2006: 7) describes as 'the debut of a Hitchcockian opera' in which 'out of control musical performances' became a prelude to violence in his later films. During the film's production, Hitchcock's famously sadistic treatment of Ondra can be seen in her failed sound test where he taunts her with accusations of 'sleeping with men' provoking her to break down into embarrassed laughter (Spoto

1983: 118). Her voice thereafter was dubbed by another actress, Joan Barry. Despite its sinister associations in the film, the sheet music for ‘Miss Up-to-Date’, composed by popular songwriters Billy Mayerl and Frank Eyton, blithely advertised its link to ‘The Great British All-Talkie Film’ and sold for two shillings.

Three months after *Blackmail*, Sinclair Hill’s melodrama *Dark Red Roses* was among a string of British talkies released in September 1929 and had a narrow escape when its negative was rescued from the fire that destroyed Wembley Studios shortly after its production there. If *Blackmail* explored the creative potential of the ‘crystal-song’ to signify a sinister plot turn, then *Dark Red Roses* took this a step further with musical leitmotifs embedded throughout the plot. The film opens with the eponymous, slightly melancholic ‘waltz song’ sung by tenor Geoffrey Withers over another blatant sales pitch for the music’s publishers. Like *Blackmail*’s ‘Miss Up-to-Date’ the sheet music was sold as ‘The Theme Song of “Dark Red Roses”. An All-British Sound Film Production’. The ‘All-British’ assertion reflected another backlash against Hollywood and British talkies used music to espouse their cultural patriotism. The film is a marital melodrama with a dark twist, starring Stuart Rome and Frances Doble as David and Laura Cardew. David, a sculptor, suspects Laura of having an affair with handsome French cellist Anton (Hugh Eden) and offers to sculpt the musician’s hands, while intending to amputate them in a grisly revenge plot. The opening scenes present an idyllic English thatched cottage but a title-card enigmatically foreshadows darker times:

Life is composed of sunshine and shadows. When happiness radiates it seems impossible that shadows can creep in—but they do—and at times the cloud that creates them is no larger than a man’s hand or his handwriting.....

The theme song, played over the titles, blends into Cardew’s Irish gardener singing W.B. Yeats’s 1889 poem *Down by the Salley Gardens* while David sings from his bathroom window. The film’s opening three minutes feature three distinct musical moments in which songs act as leitmotifs, positioning characters and foreshadowing the plot. The melodrama pivots on key musical moments, including a cello recital where Anton plays ‘Dark Red Roses’ while David watches in anguish as Laura becomes transfixed. There is also a rare glimpse of the legendary Russian dancer Georges Balanchine, who choreographed and performed his iconic

‘Russian Ballet’ (set to Mussorgsky’s *Khovanshchina*), about a husband who catches his wife with another man. As the couple watch Balanchine’s dance, parallel editing links his performance to David’s intensifying jealousy of which Laura, like *Blackmail*’s Alice, remains innocent. Like Hitchcock’s ‘Miss Up-to-Date’, ‘Dark Red Roses’ accompanies the seduction of a woman by a male interloper, and both songs destabilise masculine control which then plunges into violence and turmoil.

The British press praised *Dark Red Roses* for the quality of its sound recording which was still experiencing teething problems during these early months. Accent and dialogue delineate social status throughout the film, from the thick Irish brogue of the gardener, to David’s assured theatre-honed baritone, Laura’s clipped ‘BBC English’ and Anton’s exotic faux-French accent. The film’s music emphasised these cultural differences from the popular folk songs sung by the gardener, to Anton’s cello rendition of the title song, to Mussorgsky’s *Khovanshchina* ballet performed to the film’s fictional upper-middle-class clientele. Music is also intrinsic to the film’s ‘quality’ and *The Bioscope* (23 October 1929: 30) patriotically asserted that *Dark Red Roses* outclassed the more expensive and populist (Hollywood) counterparts in which Al Jolson ‘sobbed out’ his ‘sob-songs’ stressing that the film ‘should please every class of audience’ indicating its suitability for upper and middle-class cinema patrons (ibid.: 35).

Thomas Bentley’s *The American Prisoner* and Harry Lachman’s *Under the Greenwood Tree*, also released in September 1929, adopted further approaches to weaving music and pivotal ‘crystal-songs’ into early talkie narratives. *The American Prisoner* was an action-adventure film, adapted from Eden Phillpotts’ 1904 novel about American POWs captured in the War of Independence who escape from Britain’s isolated Dartmoor Prison. Danish silent star Carl Brisson plays the eponymous American prisoner Lieutenant Stark who, injured in his escape, is sheltered and nursed by local girl, Grace Malherb (Madeleine Carroll). Brisson’s speaking voice is accented and stilted, partly due to the wooden script and inadequacies in early microphone technology. But Brisson’s Danish accent became neutralised by his singing voice such that the film’s press advertisements boasted: ‘Our mother tongue as it should be spoken, with all the charm of the English voice’ in this ‘All British Singing and Talking film’ (*The Biggleswade Chronicle* 15 August 1930: 2). Brisson’s musical moment comes when he serenades Grace from his sickbed with the song ‘I Wonder if you will Remember?’ for which she later joins him in a piano duet,

signalling her reciprocal feelings for him. Although these musical interludes appear incongruous in an action-adventure talkie, they are key to the seduction of the female protagonist and explicitly progress the romantic sub-plot. In September 1929, writing and delivering film dialogue was a new art-form and British cinema's all-male scriptwriting teams often found it difficult to write dialogue for female characters. Music and songs, performed and recorded synchronously on the film set, could now carry the emotional weight of the scene with a spontaneity which the dialogue often lacked. Again, the song was advertised for purchase from Lawrence Wright Music Co.

Released the same month as *The American Prisoner*, *Under the Greenwood Tree* was another literary adaptation, this time from Thomas Hardy's 1872 Wessex Tale about the ousting of the Mellstock Village 'Quire' (choir) and its 'west-gallery musicians' following the arrival of the new church organ. Described by the threatened choristers as a 'miserable machine' and 'box of wind', Mellstock's villagers tellingly mistake the organ for a coffin when it first arrives on a pony and trap. In Hardy's nineteenth-century world, the Mellstock organ represented the demise of tradition. In the 1929 film adaptation, the ousting of Mellstock's 'Quire' mirrored the fate of thousands of cinema musicians being ousted from cinemas by the arrival of the talkies. *Under the Greenwood Tree* contains several musical sequences composed by Hubert Bath and Harry Stafford and arranged by up-and-coming film music director John Reynders. The musical interludes again delineate class and culture, reflecting Hardy's preoccupation with the threat of urban modernity on older rural values. The doomed choir, filmed in expressive close-ups, represents the heart of the community, performing Christmas carols and traditional folk songs at New Year's celebrations. Here, music embodies the values of an idealised English pastoral and binds local communities on the cusp of change. Musical moments are again deployed in relation to the female protagonist, this time the attractive new schoolmistress and musician Fancy Day (Marguerite Allen). Day quickly becomes the object of desire among Mellstock's bachelors, but her complicity in agreeing to play the church organ sees her branded as a 'brazen town girl' by her young suitor Dick. Like *Blackmail*'s Alice, Fancy Day embodies a level of female modernity and independence that is both desirable and problematic for male protagonists.

BRITISH MUSICAL REVUES

Early British talkies used songs to exploit the novelty of fans hearing their stars sing as well as talk, but these musical moments also heightened dramatic and romantic expression, particularly with the limitations of early spoken dialogue which required the camera to remain static and performers to enunciate clearly into fixed microphones hidden on set. In *Dark Red Roses* and *Under the Greenwood Tree* music is intrinsic to the plot; in *The American Prisoner* and *Blackmail*, music is extrinsic but develops subplots around sexual seduction, both consensual and otherwise. But these films cannot be categorised as ‘Musicals’ when compared to the succession of all-singing and dancing Hollywood extravaganzas with predictably consistent titles like *Broadway*, *Broadway Babies*, *Broadway Melody*, *Broadway Scandals*, and *Gold Diggers of Broadway* (all 1929) flooding British screens. British producers sought to emulate their commercial formula by transferring popular West End theatre revues and stage Musicals onto film. These adaptations created an artistic and historical link between popular Music Hall and Variety Theatre, to Cine Variety (which combined live performance with cinema exhibition), to full-scale film Musicals of the 1930s. Three such productions are particularly noteworthy but ultimately represented a dead-end for the subgenre as producers grappled to find successful formulas for music in film and sometimes failed. *The Co-optimists* (1929)⁵ was a direct translation of a West End ‘gang show’; *Splinters* (1929) a musical-comedy based on the eponymous all-male drag show that had entertained frontline troops in World War I; and *Elstree Calling* (1929) a variety-style omnibus featuring popular entertainers. With the exception of *Splinters*, these were critical and popular failures and failed to gain traction in British film thereafter but paved the way for Musical Variety which became a staple of British radio and television for several decades to come.

BRITAIN’S FIRST MUSICALS AND THE RISE OF THE STAR TENOR

An early British Musical subgenre featured the figure of the ‘star tenor’, particularly Joseph Hislop and Jan Kiepura who collectively starred in three very different early Musicals; *The Loves of Robbie Burns* (1930), *City of Song* (1931) and *Tell Me Tonight* (1932). Producer Herbert Wilcox had entered into a commercial partnership with His Master’s Voice (HMV)

giving him access to the company's recording stars including acclaimed Scottish tenor Hislop (Wilcox 1967: 86). *The Loves of Robbie Burns* is a romantic bio-pic recounting the poet's complex relationships with his doomed lover Mary Campbell (Eve Gray) and his long-suffering wife Jean Armour (Dorothy Seacomb). It is also a romantic celebration of eighteenth-century Scottish landscape and culture with Hislop singing traditional songs like 'Annie Laurie' and 'Auld Lang Syne' in picturesque locations around Burns' birthplace in Ayr. Reviews praised the film for democratising access to Hislop's vocal talents which were hitherto confined to Europe's opera houses and opera goers, but critics struggled to define the film without a structuring 'backstage Musical' narrative familiar from Hollywood imports. It was neither opera nor drama, and the phenomenon of characters bursting into song without diegetic motivation was a new experience for critics. Reviewer Michael Orme (12 March 1930: 504) described it as 'a curious indefinite formula which is neither that of coherent, dramatic narrative, nor [...] operatic'. The idea of the 'Musical' had not yet fully formed in British cinema. Mindful of satisfying 'elite' cultural tastes, *The Bioscope* (5 March 1930: 31) considered the film suitable for 'first class houses' with plaudits for Hislop's singing and the film's excellent recording quality. But the film was a commercial failure that failed to increase record sales, and HMV pulled out of the partnership. Wilcox blamed the 'indigenous' nature of the subject and Hislop's lack of appeal among popular cinemagoers (Wilcox 1967: 86). The implication of Wilcox's remarks was that the film was both 'too highbrow' and 'too Scottish' for popular tastes and audiences south of the Scottish border. Hislop was forty-six at the time and his operatic acting and declamatory vocal style appeared dated and un-cinematic and he made an unconvincing romantic lead, a role that Jan Kiepura was soon to fulfil with aplomb.

Song and musical interludes were rapidly becoming integrated into the narrative structure and dialogue patterns of British films as creative techniques and technology progressed. Following Hislop's failure to impress audiences, producers turned to young Polish tenor Jan Kiepura. Kiepura was handsome, a more naturalistic film actor and made a perfect romantic lead with his charismatic mittel-European accent that recorded well in early talkies when voices were particularly noteworthy. Critics and publicists heralded him as the 'new Caruso'⁶ and exploited his real-life bachelor status to entice his growing army of British female fans. Kiepura starred in three Multi-Language Versions (MLVs): *City of Song*

(1930), *Tell Me Tonight* (1932) and *My Song for You* (1934), featuring a range of European talent. MLVs were shot in different languages simultaneously using the same sets and locations but substituting stars and technical teams where necessary. MLV Musicals were popular during the transitional period as they enabled producers to spread production costs, engage the best European talent and maximise distribution by exploiting the international appeal of their music. *City of Song* (*Die Singende Stadt* in Germany), a musical romance set in London and Naples, was a British-German co-production, directed by Italian Carmine Gallone with an Austrian producer, Hungarian cinematographer and Danish editor working with a Polish star. This European line-up represented the ambitions of the film's newly-established British production company, Associated Sound Film Industries, to collaborate with European producers rather than attempting to conquer American markets or confine themselves to a narrow domestic output.⁷

Kiepura plays Giovanni Cavallone, a lowly Neapolitan singer and tourist guide who encounters Claire (Betty Stockfeld), a wealthy English socialite who spots his potential. In contrast to the ways in which musical leitmotifs serviced masculinity in the examples we have seen so far, the musical plot device here services female agency when Claire becomes Giovanni's sponsor and brings him to London to find his fame and fortune. Here, Giovanni is introduced to Claire's wealthy, xenophobic English friends at a specially organised debut performance where he is the special attraction. As Giovanni appears, one of Claire's male friends instructs him to 'do the odd spot of bowing' in response to the applause, emphasising Giovanni's awkward inexperience of social etiquette. Unusually for an early sound film, the camera then escapes its sound booth and tracks fluidly around the dinner-suited guests, eavesdropping on snippets of gossip about Claire's relationship with her protégé and observing the film's social and sexual dynamics. When Giovanni sings, the camera cuts away from him to focus on the looks between Claire and her distracted male admirers as she, rapt in his performance, becomes annoyed at their inattentiveness. This scene echoes silent film technique as the performances are largely mimetic, with Giovanni's off-camera singing and diegetic waltz music providing the soundtrack to the various flirtations and interactions, culminating in a private, shared kiss between Claire and Giovanni. The music also provides the rhythm and choreography of the scene in terms of the movement of performers and camera.

Mistaking Claire's patronage for love and becoming increasingly child-like in his jealous sulks, Giovanni's advances are thereafter rebuked. His possessive and fiery Italian 'nature' cannot accommodate her socialite lifestyle and jazz-era urbanity, and even his sparkling tenor performances cannot protect him from being branded an unsophisticated Neapolitan by London society. Broken-hearted and unable to transcend his position without Claire's patronage, Giovanni returns to Naples. But despite the ways in which the plot emasculates Giovanni, it pivots around Kiepura's singing; from popular Neapolitan ballads like 'Fishermen of Pusilleco' in the ruined theatre at Pompeii, to opera classics like 'La Donna è mobile' and Paul Abraham's newly commissioned 'Signora, I Want to Say Carissima'. Although Giovanni's talent offers no passport into English society, his singing creates moments of authenticity which represent the moral centre of the film and highlight the vacuous superfluity of Claire's clique. Throughout the film, musical interludes effectively free the performers and film technique from the constraints of serving Miles Malleon's rather stilted script, allowing the unbridled expression of mimed emotion, which early film dialogue often stifled. The film's final wordless scenes show Giovanni's passionate reunion with his long-suffering girlfriend Carmella (Heather Angel) on the picturesque Napoli coast before cutting to a reclining and crestfallen Claire, listening to his singing on a gramophone player controlled by the hand of an unseen male in her London apartment, Giovanni's physical presence now substituted for a mechanical recording. The contrast between Giovanni's Italian passion and Claire's English restraint is evident, and the final shot shows her miserably slumped across her couch implying thwarted desire and romantic frustration over what might have been. Both Giovanni and Claire are trapped into their respective social and geographical spaces which music allowed them temporarily to transcend.

If *City of Song* introduced Kiepura to British audiences, his next feature *Tell Me Tonight*, promoted by its eponymous title song, cemented his star status in Britain. The film is a Musical-comedy set in the Swiss Alps where Kiepura plays Enrico Ferraro, another Italian opera singer, but this time one so overwhelmed by success that he changes places with a petty criminal Alexander Koretsky (Sonnie Hale) to escape 'Non-Stop Nora', his over-zealous tour manager. Unlike *City of Song* where music diminishes the male lead in the face of sexual and social rejection, in *Tell Me Tonight* music services male sexual agency and romantic appeal. Having escaped his contractual obligations to tour, Enrico drives incognito along

Locarno's vertiginous mountain roads where he rescues the local mayor's daughter Mathilde (Magda Schneider) from a car crash. The romantic plot then contrives to get the couple together and to maximise opportunities for Kiepura to sing by spontaneously accompanying village choirs, singing opera classics in local civic concerts and seducing Mathilde with the film's crystal-song, 'Tell Me Tonight'. Such was the song's impact that the *Kinematograph Weekly's* Musical Supplement (Owen, 8 December 1932: 30) advised exhibitors to play the song before the start of the film and during the interval, with live orchestra or gramophone, to create atmosphere in the cinema. In the film, John Orton's dialogue fizzles with energetic wit and the producers exploit Kiepura's talents as a romantic comedian, played off against Hale's likeable rogue and Schneider's wholesome sexual vivacity. Directed with bravura by Ukrainian-Lithuanian Anatole Litvak working with an Austrian, German, Spanish and Ukrainian crew, it was released as *Das Lied einer Nacht* in Germany and *Chanson d'une nuit* in France. The film tapped into a pan-European taste for MLV Musical-comedies and operetta films exemplified by *Melody of the Heart* (*Melodie des Herzens*, 1929), *Three from the Filling Station* (*Die Drei von der Tankstelle*, 1930), *Sunshine Susie* (*Die Privatsekretärin*, 1931) and *Congress Dances* (*Der Kongress tanzt*, 1931). Nevertheless, critic Sydney Tremayne (1932), citing the exemplar musical achievements of French film maker René Clair, argued that despite its excellent qualities the film still failed to incorporate music that 'was part of the plot, with synchronised action and vocalisation contributing to the rhythm and credibility of the "pattern"'. Tremayne was referring to the ways in which the film's narrative flow halts to allow Kiepura to sing in largely static performances designed to showcase his talent and the film's title song. The integration of action and vocalisation that Tremayne called for was addressed to some extent, in the films and performances of Gracie Fields which combined song and physical movement as we shall see below.

WORKING CLASS CULTURE AND MUSICAL TASTES: THE RISE OF GRACIE FIELDS

By 1931 the language and technology of early talkies had evolved significantly and Britain's producers were becoming more *au fait* with addressing popular musical tastes, particularly after the commercial failure of *The Loves of Robbie Burns*. The talkies had also opened up class, regional and cultural differences around accent and idiomatic speech, and

ordinary cinemagoers from the British regions found that the default ‘BBC English’ of early talkies bore no relation to their own idiom. Popular Lancashire-born Variety star Gracie Fields was discovered by producer Basil Dean who cast her in Maurice Elvey’s *Sally in Our Alley* (1931). Fields had a unique soprano vocal style with a range that lent itself to blues or comic songs which she delivered with a pronounced Lancashire accent, and a restless performance style in which songs emanate from her physicality and movements.

Fields plays Sally Winch, a coffee-shop waitress in the crowded Victorian inner city who entertains her clientele with songs like the ‘Lancashire Blues’, performed with vocal gymnastics, whistles, scat singing and the impersonation of a trombone. Sally sings with unselfconscious spontaneity while simultaneously shouting orders into the café’s kitchen, and the song becomes an integral part of the cacophony and rhythms of the teeming café and the physicality of Sally’s work and social interactions. The song’s lyrics promote Lancashire over Tennessee (‘Rochdale is good enough for me’); local ‘hot-pot’ over ‘waffles’, and clogs over shoes, making a virtue of hardship and deprivation. The film’s title song ‘Sally’, first played on a barrel organ over the film’s opening credits, also firmly establishes links between geography and musical culture with images of children playing among the crowded Victorian tenements. Like ‘The Lancashire Blues’, the title song also extols a sense of working-class fixity and identity with place, imploring the eponymous Sally never to leave the ‘alley’. Social mobility is both discouraged and undesirable. According to Gledhill (2003: 20), British silent cinema worked to maintain class divides through the delineation of social and geographical spaces which are rarely breached. In early sound films, it also sought to delineate social divisions through musical tastes and musical performance. When Sally’s talents are spotted by a couple of aristocratic ‘slum tourists’ who exclaim that ‘she’s quite too marvellous’, she is hired as their party entertainer. But on arrival at their wealthy home, she finds herself totally out of place with the hostess audibly declaiming ‘look at the state of her!’ Like Giovanni being taught to bow in *City of Song*, the family’s servants make her more acceptable to the exquisitely costumed guests before she is allowed on stage. Sally’s comic nonsense song ‘Fred Fannakapan’, performed with comedic expression and exaggerated plosives, gets even the stuffiest old dowager singing along. But once the performance is over the status quo resumes and she is an outcast, invisible to the indifferent partygoers. Mistaking a waiter’s attentions for an invitation to dance, she loses him his job and is

herself summarily dismissed, returning to the bosom of her coffee shop to perform ‘Sally’ to her own people and a rapturous welcome. The contrast between the stifling upper-class party and the seething humanity of the coffee shop could not be greater. Again, the performer and performance, plucked from their origins, are commodified by an unappreciative social elite who regard them and their culture as a temporary curio.

Both *Sally* and *City of Song* celebrate working-class authenticity at a time of economic deprivation and hardship, *Sally* confronts the realities of slum poverty and violence against women and Sally’s young friend Florrie (Florence Desmond), a Garbo-obsessed work-shy, is constantly beaten by her abusive father, her only escape being in the pages of cinema fan magazines. The studio sets for Sally’s coffee house and adjoining slums echo contemporary German films like Pabst’s *The Threepenny Opera* (1931) and Fritz Lang’s *M* (1931), where crowded tenements house authentic humanity and vibrant working-class culture, but also trap people into poverty and casual violence.

American *Variety* (21 July 1931: 34) offered a typically muted review, saying *Sally* was ‘better than most English films [...] the songs are not particularly impressive and the general standard nothing to shout about’. The British magazine *Picturegoer* (25 July 1931: 4) claimed that Fields did not have a ‘film face’, suggesting that she was not classically beautiful, but that her personality shone through. Field’s popularity cannot be underestimated; producer Basil Dean described her as a ‘financial lifebelt’ at a time when his company’s fortunes were precarious and studios built their films around her (Guy 2000: 103). Ironically perhaps, it was Fields’ controlling husband, Archie Pitt, who asked Dean to put her in pictures (Dean 1973: 133). The success of *Sally* alerted producers to the spending power of mass regional audiences and Fields starred in a number of Musicals set among working-class communities such as *Looking on the Bright Side* (1932) and *Sing as We Go* (1934) in which she plays ordinary, unlucky-in-love women, overlooked for more beautiful rivals, but whose indomitable personality and singing ultimately triumph.

CONCLUSION

The dramatic power of synchronised music and song was recognised from the moment British cinema converted to sound and producers experimented with its potential with varying degrees of creative success. Musical moments were deployed as pivotal plot devices, to intensify drama and

to convey gender, class and cultural differences. They also helped to compensate for the shortcomings of early talkie dialogue by creating moments of spectacle which freed the performers, camera and sound from simply delivering dialogue. Static microphones on early talkie sets required fixed performative spaces and staccato movement in which the actor had to remain still, or move from one microphone to the next to speak dialogue. Diegetic music, performed and recorded in situ on set, helped to reintroduce a sense of fluidity and movement by superseding and supplanting dialogue as we saw in *City of Song*.

In *Blackmail* and *Dark Red Roses*, songs also reflect complex and contradictory impulses around male sexual aggression and jealousy. In *Under the Greenwood Tree*, music was a signifier of an idealised bucolic past and the destabilising influence of the 'outsider' female protagonist. In *City of Song*, music is associated with Giovanni's emasculation as he fails to seduce his powerful female benefactor and find international fame, but his singing represents moments of cultural authenticity and emotional intensity in contrast to the stultifying xenophobia of upper-crust London society. The desirable and powerful male tenor soon became Kiepu-ra's default persona as producers realised his commercial potential as a romantic lead, particularly on his growing army of female fans who formed the majority audiences for British cinema. As screenwriters began to ascribe more meaningful talkie roles to women characters, rather than confining them to passive or romantic victims, popular stars like Betty Balfour and Gracie Fields were granted agency as Musical-comedians and heralded the rise of female-led Musical performances exemplified by the films of Jessie Matthews in the 1930s.

Decisions around the inclusion of music in early talkies were often based on commercial as well as creative considerations, particularly by producers like Herbert Wilcox and Basil Dean who needed to realise a quick financial return following the expense of wiring their studios for sound and the increased production costs of early talkies. Commercial partnerships with gramophone companies, later to become ubiquitous in cinema, got off to a precarious and short-lived start as producers grappled to find their hit 'crystal-song'. Caught between the commercial imperatives of Hollywood and the revered cultural reputation of European cinema, producers also tried to forge a distinct national identity through music and dialogue by foregrounding British songs and singing stars, and the 'English voice'. Notwithstanding early flops like *The Co-Optimists*, the 1930s became a 'golden decade' for the genre until the start of World

War II when British cinema, now under governmental direction, turned its priorities into servicing the War effort, where Musicals had little space to thrive.

Influential and highbrow British theatre and music critics largely deplored British films in general and early British Musicals in particular and American critics consistently derided British productions, which largely stymied the ambitions of Musical producers like Herbert Wilcox to break into the big international Anglophone markets with films like *The Loves of Robbie Burns*. Early British Musicals like *Raise the Roof* or *Sally in Our Alley* addressed the realities of social inequality but the intellectual Left, represented by journals like *Close Up*, still disregarded them as too frivolous compared to European films like Pabst's *Kameradschaft* (1931) which they adored. However, critical opprobrium made little impact on the *business* of cinema as it was ordinary people who paid to see British films and not the readers of *Close Up*, and Musicals satisfied a crucial need for affordable and escapist entertainment during the economic depression of the early 1930s. But we cannot simply accuse contemporary 1930s' critics for their disparagement, as the majority of early British Musicals and their musical moments remain overlooked even among revisionist cinema historians today.

NOTES

1. See Porter (2020).
2. I am drawing on Amy Herzog's (2009) definition of a 'musical moment' throughout this article.
3. For the purposes of this article Gifford's (1986) classification, which uses information from original tradeshow records will be used to ascribe release dates of films and their genre classification.
4. See Rohmer and Chabrol (1979: 24), Spoto (1983: 119), and Truffaut (1978: 72).
5. See Wallace (1930) and Bond (1930) for withering critique of *The Co-Optimists*.
6. See Kinematograph Weekly, 16 January 1930: 22.
7. For a more detailed account of the production and exhibition of *City of Song* (*Die Singende Stadt*) see Brown (2013: 194–199).

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PART III

Musical Dis/Placements—Musical Moments
in Global Cinema



Musical Numbers in Bollywood Cinema's Homeland and Diaspora

Rajinder Dudrah

Since the rise of scholarship on Bollywood cinema, most notably from the 2000s, the cinema's relationship to its diaspora has featured regularly as a theme for exploration (e.g. Dwyer 2000; Mishra 2002; Viridi 2003; Desai 2004; Ganti 2004; Kaur and Sinha 2005; Dudrah 2006a; Kavoori and Punathambekar 2008; Rai 2009; Mehta and Pandharipande 2011; Dudrah 2012).¹ Even when Bollywood cinema is predominantly representing its Indian diaspora, due to its large South Asian audiences both in the subcontinent and around the world, it hegemonically has come to represent ideas about the homeland and its diaspora for many South Asian audiences globally. This has primarily to do with South Asian societies and cultures facing similar issues such as culture and globalisation, modernity, the rural and the urban, the role of gender in developing societies and so on. Bollywood cinema has been able to represent these issues through its own particular idioms and been able to disseminate its films

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via highly organised systems of production and global distribution. The scholarship in this area has also pointed out the mostly binary relationship that Bollywood cinema tends to construct between India and the West. Here, India and Indians in the homeland are often positioned as the moral authority and the West and Westerners, including many Indians living in the West, are depicted as its negative counterpart. The West is also presented as a place to travel to for economic investment through NRI [non-resident Indian] remittances and opportunities to better one's life, but the socio-cultural complexities and nuances of life in the diaspora are mostly overlooked or depicted sparingly (Dudrah 2012: 9–10).

While previous studies have dealt at some length with the stories and overall cultural politics about the representation of diaspora more broadly through film plots, characterisations, dialogues, and signs and symbols associated with the homeland and diaspora, very few studies have dealt specifically with musical numbers as expositions of the same. This is an interesting lacuna in the current Bollywood scholarship that deals with homeland and diaspora representations for at least two reasons. First, musical numbers are an important feature of almost all mainstream Bollywood films that are fundamental to their storytelling, as well as an elaboration of key moments of the film through spectacle. Secondly, musical numbers also work in ways that might well promote a film's ostensibly conservative ideology, while also simultaneously, or at other points in the same film, be open to new lines of flight towards exciting and complex possibilities, thereby generating a range of pleasures and even contradictions. Musical numbers, therefore, offer a fruitful area of focus for further exploration of Bollywood's dealing with homeland and diaspora issues.

As part of the rise in Bollywood scholarship over the past two decades, a sub-field has also emerged around song and dance where aspects of musical moments or musical numbers have been elaborated on. Within the scholarship there now exists a developing understanding of the song-dance numbers, film *geet*, song picturisations, or musical numbers as they are often interchangeably referred to (e.g. Gopalan 2002; Garwood 2006; Gopal and Sen 2008; Gopal and Moorti 2008; Ganti 2012; Gehlawat and Dudrah 2019). Studies have shown the ways in which song and dance are particular components of the popular Indian cinema aesthetic while also sharing some similarities and marked differences with other cinemas that feature musical numbers, namely Hollywood cinema. These include: song and dance acting as narrative accelerators, deepening the

emotional texture of the film's narrative; they are not momentary pauses in the action disturbing the narrative flow, rather they function as central components that can contain the film's overriding message; song picturisations code the inexpressible and the transgressive, acting as ways of getting around censorship laws in India (Gopal and Moorti 2008: 5). The song and dance sequences have a pre-cinematic life that circulates outside the exhibition space acting as mini trailers, and songs and music seem to condense and stand in for the films of which they are a part (ibid.: 3). Bollywood film songs can also have a long post-cinematic life functioning as India's pop music, comprising a lingua franca of the Hindi-Urdu languages that cross regional and national boundaries. By extension these songs are one of the main sources of popular music across parts of the South Asian diaspora too, featuring on radio stations, music video channels and on satellite TV. The songs are bought and downloaded just as much as the movies, and in some cases, the sales of songs have been known to outperform a film's unsuccessful income at the box office (ibid.: 6).²

MUSICAL NUMBERS AND TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

My approach to musical numbers is to draw attention to aspects of their key features as set out in the above literature from the sub-field of Bollywood song and dance numbers (i.e. namely how they function as narrative accelerators, contain important messages that run throughout the film, alongside working in affecting and transgressive ways). I further wish to develop my textual analysis of the chosen musical numbers as drawing inspiration from the literature on musical numbers as applied to other cinemas. Here, I am particularly drawn to the work of Amy Herzog (2009) and Phil Powrie (2017) who, respectively, use musical moments and numbers from Hollywood musicals and French cinema as their primary examples. Both, in related but also very different ways, make reference to the construction and assemblage of representation in musical numbers and the kinds of pleasures that viewing audiences—individually and collectively—may derive from such moments. Where they demonstrate differences of opinion and/or focus in their arguments is that Herzog relies more heavily on a Deleuzian approach to cinema as art and philosophy, and art and philosophy as cinema, which primarily might be made intelligible through a hermeneutic analysis. Powrie, on

the other hand, while also drawing on aspects of Deleuzian ideas of intensity in the cinematic experience, gives further value to the feeling/s that might be experienced—as a one-off or repeatedly—through the affective moments on hearing a piece of music or song in combination with the images we see on screen. He terms this as ‘imusimagic’—i.e. music and images creating magic on screen for us as spectators and audiences through affect (Powrie 2017:11). These differences aside, both in their idiosyncratic ways, demonstrate usefully for us as to why musical numbers and their analyses matter. For Herzog musical moments erupt within all manner of cinematic and video forms, and we need to explore their philosophical, cultural and political implications (Herzog 2009: 3). Following this line of thought, this allows her to ask for us: What is it that the work of the musical moment does or performs (ibid.: 8)? Furthermore, how might musical moments make us feel, through their affective power (ibid.: 15)? Powrie, taking on and extending some of these concerns, searches for ‘the deliciously different, the quizzical, the thoughtfully provocative, the in-between’ in musical moments (2017: 3), as such is their elusive draw. Locating my film analysis of musical numbers as arising from the intersection of Bollywood studies and film musical analysis more generally, especially of the kind exemplified by Herzog and Powrie, I wish to use musical numbers in some of Bollywood cinema’s diaspora films to explore ideologies, representations and affective possibilities of the homeland and diaspora relationship. In doing so, close analysis will be made to show how the musical numbers elaborate and illuminate aspects of the films’ cultural representations around homeland and diaspora issues. Reference will also be made to how musical moments from these films are used and recreated in the afterlife of the films as popular culture, circulating as musical numbers in queer diasporic South Asian club spaces, which is further illustrative of how homeland and diaspora issues move beyond the films to lived spaces in the South Asian diaspora. I will end by considering how homeland-diaspora representations are being depicted in some contemporary post-2000 films.

PURAB AUR PACHHIM AND DES PARDESH

In considering the first type of diaspora film as presenting tropes that can be considered as its dominant ideology towards representations of the homeland and diaspora, I want to use musical numbers from two films from the post-war era from the 1970s. These two examples taken

together serve to illustrate a now long-standing trope of representation in Bollywood that conservatively celebrates the homeland and diaspora relationship. Examining these films side by side also reveals the 1970s as an understudied period in Bollywood cinema, and that depictions of Indian cultural identity that was undergoing transformation in the overseas space were not always represented in homogeneous ways.

The first film in this section—*Purab Aur Pachhim* (*East and West*, 1970)—is iconic, very popular and well-referenced in Bollywood studies, while the other film—*Des Pardesh* (*Homeland and Abroad*, 1978)—has received very little attention in the existing scholarship in this area. Both are from the same decade with several years apart from each other in terms of their initial production and release.

Purab Aur Pachhim has been a mainstay in terms of its predominantly conservative ideology being recycled in other films about the homeland and diaspora relationship. It enjoyed a huge box office success in India and overseas on its initial release, and is regularly shown on South Asian satellite TV channels confirming its ongoing popularity. It can be characterised as a classic example of upholding Indian values against perceived decadent Western ones. The film's hero Bharat (Manoj Kumar) not only courts the British Indian heroine Preeti (Saira Banu), showing her the fallacies of her Western ways, but also returns with her to India to get married and settle there as their proper place of home. The film's poster plays on the stark contrast between these two main leads, with Bharat dressed in traditional male Indian attire, a Nehru jacket, and Preeti who is visibly seen as Western with her dyed blonde hair and mini dress (see Fig. 7.1). Sequences, music and dialogues from this film have been quoted and re-used explicitly or implicitly in later popular films as a homage, and also picking up the idea of India as a moral and cultural high ground over its Western counterparts. Latter examples include *Dilwale Dulhane Le Jayenge* (*The Braveheart will Take the Bride*, 1995) and *Namastey London* (*Hello London*, 2007).

One of the many iconic musical moments in *Purab Aur Pachhim* takes place between the transition from the colonial to the post-colonial period in India's history, as it moves to a state of full independence. The first 17 minutes of the film are in black and white representing, literally, the dark old days under British colonial rule; that is, until the changing of the flag in the mise en scène and the film stock changing to colour from here on. This moment is accompanied by a musical number, the song 'Om Jai Jagdish Hare', a traditional Hindu prayer praising the creator and seeking



Fig. 7.1 Film poster for *Purab Aur Pachhim* featuring the hero Bharat (Manoj Kumar) dressed in an Indian Nehru jacket and heroine Preeti (Saira Banu) in Western attire, respectively (Courtesy of Vishal International Productions Ltd., India)

blessings for a new day and new beginnings.³ An apt choice of song then for this pivotal moment in the film's narrative as it moves from the old to the new, the colonial to the post-colonial. The musical number, one that also appears throughout the film as a leitmotif, begins in a Radha Krishna temple with a large religious congregation. They have gathered to give thanks for the birth of a young boy and girl, who go on to play the hero and his cousin sister, and as the film moves from colonialism to independence, the song also marks another moment of thanks—freedom. The first 30 seconds of the song play out the musical sounds of being in a gathering for prayer and devotion—tabla, dholak, sitar and bells syncopate with people singing the hymn in front of the idols.

The song and diegetic space in the temple halts abruptly, followed with a black and white caption showing the date of Indian independence as 15 August 1947—it is written in Hindi above and in English below. We cut to a scene of the changing of the British Union Jack. It is being lowered slowly, again filmed in black and white, which is followed by the Indian flag being hoisted and the screen turning to Technicolor as the Indian flag substitutes the British one. The montage sequence cuts to the dawn of a new colourful day with a red and golden yellow sun rising, and a crescendo of bells, conches and percussion instruments play us back to the temple leading to a medium-close-up shot of the idols of Radha and Krishna in their new colourful splendour. The tempo of the song has now increased and become more upbeat as we move to independence, in colour, and also we shift along in years through a series of jump cuts. These cuts first show us the newly born boy and girl, jumping to them as seven or eight year olds praying and singing in the temple, followed by a series of shots of green fields and mustard crops, the industrial manufacturing of coal, molten metal being processed in factories, a crane shot taking us from the top of the outside domes of the temple to inside the open prayer hall, to a side medium-close-up profile of the young Bharat being immersed in Hindu religious culture with a guiding elder's hand placed on his head, followed by several temple wall paintings of revered saints and religious figures illustrating the education and ideals being instilled in him. Another jump cut takes us to the adult Bharat who is now at the head of the congregation and is leading the prayer behind the temple priest via song, dressed in a traditional Indian white *kurta* and grey shawl. This sequence of the montage happens relatively quickly over a duration of approximately thirty seconds. Time has moved on literally,

almost 20 years, the family and its members have aged but their devotion and communal religious practices have remained steadfast, keeping them together, and not least seeing them through their trials from colonialism to more prosperous times in independence. The musical number visually accelerates the narrative for us, tying culture and modern changes together, while the audio track remains constant, conveying tradition as the requirement that is necessary, irrespective of time and generational shifts. Religious and cultural practices and the transmission of culture are performed differently through the role of men and women—men are seen to be leading and are head of a patriarchal culture. The song is play-backed by the male and female voices of Mahendra Kapoor, Brij Bhushan and Shyama Chittar. Using Mahendra Kapoor as the lead singer with his emboldened voice gives gravitas to the ritual and plea in the lyrics, as well as affirming the leading role that men play in this religious ceremony.

This musical number is full of Indian cultural references filmed in a documentary style that gives us insights into hegemonic North Indian Hindu religious practices alongside actual industrial footage of land and machinery being used side by side. The song lyrics and music are well-known daily religious prayers that create a sense of further realism of the ethnographic occurrences being performed on screen. In this sequence, India is ‘the East’ from the film’s title; it is revered and shows off its ability to remain traditional and constant even while undergoing socio-economic development. Through further iconic moments similar to this one in the film—musical and non-musical—India as the homeland is used and pitted against London (‘the West’ in the film’s title) as a source of higher cultural values.

This musical number, then, can be analysed via the use of its sound and images as predominately conservative, tying audiences to ideological notions of ‘Indianness’. However, this is not to deny the pleasures entailed here that might both affirm conformity and static approaches to culture, while also permitting and even encouraging epiphanic moments of release, religious experience and spiritual awakening that are created and can be carried with the force of such a musical number. Such moments can also encourage personal imaginative experiences and pleasure that can take us away from the on-screen conservatism, albeit momentarily. For instance, a moment of religious or spiritual uplift is also possible here due to the way in which the sequence in the temple is crafted through the *darshan*ic gaze approach in popular Hindi cinema. This is a well-studied method of filmmaking and audience reception in

earlier Indian cinema studies where images of frontality and literal surface pleasures are given significance in the first instance in the filmmaking and viewing processes (e.g. Chakravarty 1993; Vasudevan 2000; Lutgendorf 2006). Here, the audience views the seeing of the statues of the Indian gods as if they are actually in front of them, and where the gods, with their visible eyes and reciprocal gaze, are looking back at the devotees and by implication the audience. There is a possibility for a perceived religious or spiritual experience here as the sound and images replicate—and with the use of the crescendo of the musical instruments and increasing of the tempo to exaggerate—the religious dimension, not least in the darkened theatre auditorium or in the personal space of one's home. The viewer can be encouraged to partake in the musical number itself as an act of prayer or contemplation with eyes closed, diverted momentarily away from the images on screen. This analysis ties in with what Powrie (2017: 11) calls 'imusimagic'—an intense experience drawn from the magical workings of cinema as it creates affect through music and images working together. Furthermore, both the problematic and exciting possibilities of imusimagic moments are alluded to here, and imusimagic analyses could also be extended further to consider imaginative and spiritual affects, borne out of a reciprocal or *darshanic* engagement with the on-screen musical number as argued in this instance. Further still, and as Herzog (2009: 15) poses for us as to how might musical moments make us feel through their affective power, not only do such moments in musical numbers make us feel in particular kinds of ways, they can also help transport us to other imagined places via the force of their performance.

If this musical number from *Purab Aur Pachhim* is primarily illustrative of a now dominant trope of representation in Bollywood cinema, that began in the early 1970s and remains with us in film and related popular culture even today, then it is important to revisit this moment of Bollywood cinema history by looking at another representation of diaspora from the same time, one that has been overlooked in the scholarship thus far.

Some eight years later and with the release of *Des Pardesh*, we also see indicated in the title the preoccupation with homeland and diaspora issues in this film, albeit dealt with quite differently overall. Like *Purab Aur Pachhim* before it, *Des Pardesh* is also set in the immediate post-war period of migration from the Indian subcontinent to Britain. It too holds dear the family unit and Indian cultural values, but depicts a much less moral tone in relation to these issues, as the film is also highly suggestive

of and represents cultural change in the new diasporic space as one to be negotiated, not least around notions of ‘home’ and belonging. The plot of the film interweaves a social drama and murder mystery thriller focusing on migrant South Asian working-class lives in Britain. It also deals with illegal South Asian immigration to the UK and those who profit from this as the film’s villains. The film’s poster suggests a story that is very much routed in and through Britain. In it, the hero Veer Sahni (Dev Anand) stands in front of the Union Jack flag, clearly identified as an Indian and Hindu as he holds a *diya* lamp, traditionally used for prayer in temples, with a red vermilion mark on his forehead. The lead character is not indicated as being at odds with his settings, instead he is placed centre frame amidst the flag of Great Britain (see Fig. 7.2). In these respects, the opening credits of the film, a musical number too, is in stark contrast to the aforementioned musical number of *Purab Aur Pachhim*.

A passenger jumbo jet is seen taking off from a runway in India/the *des*, setting off for *pardesh*/the foreign land.⁴ A crescendo fanfare of wind and string instruments accompanies the moment of taking flight as the film’s production credit titles and names of actors begin to roll. As the plane flies off into the distance, the crescendo slows down and changes

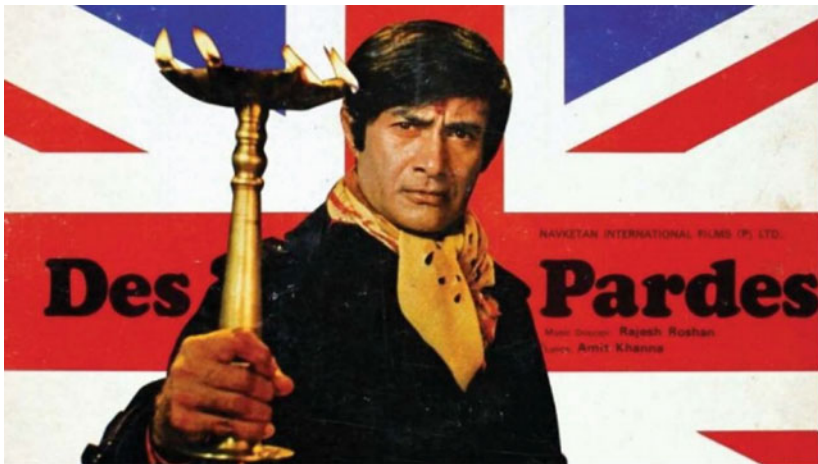


Fig. 7.2 Film poster for *Des Pardes* featuring its male lead Veer Shani (Dev Anand) displaying an Indian cultural tradition with a backdrop of the British Union Jack (Courtesy of Navketan International Films Ltd., India)

pace to become a more melancholic piece of music, conveyed by much slower and sober violin and *sarangi* sounds suggesting the loss of loved ones and moving away from a homeland that is also part of the travails of migration. This music continues as the montage cuts to a busy Indian street scene where everyday people are going about their business amidst the hustle and bustle of daily city life. A chorus of male and female voices sing an elated 'Des' which appears in blood red on the bottom left portion of the screen. A *bansuri*/Indian flute replaces the *sarangi* sound, lifting the mood. This remains for approximately five seconds and the Indian street scenes change to British ones in London, with a change from everyday brown folk being replaced with predominantly everyday white folk going about their business in 1970s England. A shift also takes place in the urban iconography from Indian street signs, bicycles, rickshaws and buses, to British traffic lights, pedestrians crossing a road, to London black cabs. The chorus sings an equally matching elated 'Pardesh' over these images as the word appears through a dissolve on the bottom right-hand side of the screen, joining 'Des' on the left and completing the film's title. The *bansuri* also plays over these images and captions continuing the changing mood of new possibilities and new beginnings, merging the words Des and Pardesh together. In case anyone was in doubt where in Pardesh these images are taking us, the London street scenes change to outside the gates of Buckingham Palace with its tourists and related hustle and bustle. We are in the capital and in the heart of this English city.

A fanfare of violins leads us to the happy voice of the main playback singer, Kishore Kumar, who starts to sing the lyrics and chorus of this opening number over the ensuing montage: 'We will find happiness here. *Apna hai apna yeh des pardes*/This is our home too, this place abroad'. From picture postcard-esque images to an aerial crane shot that pans from left to right surveying across the cityscape of London, with the British Telecom tower seen on the horizon in the distance, the montage includes images of street marches by South Asians for racial equality with men and women holding banners written in English, Urdu and Punjabi—'Smash the National Front'; working-class streets with terraced housing inhabited by South Asian families; shots outside Buckingham Palace; equality speeches being made in Hyde Park; a petition being delivered by a group of South Asian men to 10 Downing Street; window car footage from a drive down West London Southall's Broadway with its South Asian shops; a quick succession of edit cuts that take us across different

working lives from men and women in the car-making industries, catering and fashion; women, children and families playing in parks, dressed in a mixture of western and South Asian attire; children playing in the streets; outside shots of busy cinemas in London that showed 1970s Bollywood films (the Dominion and Century Cinema); Asian sweets shops selling *paan* (betel leaves) to customers; large industrial furnaces viewed from a moving car; young British Asian mothers smiling with their newly borns; Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother riding in her golden, horse-drawn carriage on a Royal occasion; an inter-racial young Caucasian and Indian couple courting on a university campus; a British Indian female bank clerk counting out notes of cash over the bank counter. After this scene, the montage shifts from actual documentary footage back to the diegesis of the film where we are re-introduced to one of the characters, Samir Sahni (Pran). He is smartly dressed in a western suit and overcoat, going about his daily business. An edit cut occurs here, via a stop frame action followed by a semi-dissolve, taking us to a scene of his family in India tearfully waving goodbye to him at the airport gates as he leaves for London. The next shot, via a jump cut, shows him setting up his business as the landlord of an English pub where the musical number and opening credits sequence ends. This montage blends fact and fiction together to create a more open, liberal, negotiated and inviting picture of the 1970s diaspora space in the UK.

The song, playbaced by Kishore Kumar, includes lyrics written by Amit Khanna and music by Rajesh Roshan, which capture the pleasures and pains of uprooting and settlement to a new place overseas, but one that is anticipated as '*apna*', as ours. The music while identifiably 'Indian' manages to perform a modern music score which simultaneously creates the affect of melancholia, contemplation and excitement of the new, and Kumar's voice is melodic and upbeat. The song's picturisation includes documentary-style shots of British Asians adjusting to the rhythms and routines of post-war 1970s work and settlement, in a post-colonial Britain on the cusp of multi-cultural and multi-racial change. The musical number even includes rare footage, for Bollywood cinema of this period at least, of British Asians amassing together in anti-Nazi and anti-racist demonstrations across London—place, here, is literally being shown as historically struggled over and negotiated in the new space abroad. The relationship between the homeland and diaspora is presented in interesting and nuanced ways. New diasporic formations are seen to be taking

place in the overseas space in the UK, and 'home' is not only the 'des' left behind, but also being made in 'pardesh', the new place of settlement.

Considering these two musical moments from two different films from the same decade, and both pertaining to issues of the homeland and diaspora, we are able to see and hear two different possibilities about the homeland and diaspora. Interestingly, the director and lead actor of *Purab Aur Pashchim*, Manoj Kumar, uses his film to continue to direct and cast himself as a patriotic hero, thereby creating a star persona for himself and his film narratives that relied on an ideology of nationalism.⁵ Dev Anand, on the other hand, the director and star of *Des Pardesh*, takes another more modern and open approach to ideas of the nation and Indians overseas in his 1978 film. Herzog's (2009: 8) earlier query for us, as to what is it that the work of the musical number does or performs, is answered two-fold in this instance. Musical numbers here not only help to tell and illuminate the stories of these films, but they also offer us ways to think about how representations of the homeland and diaspora can be embellished with conservatism and complexity, and sometimes simultaneously. These two films are examples of a predominant signifier in popular Hindi cinema in which the homeland and diaspora are cast in relation to each other, and this can certainly be seen in post-war diaspora-themed films up to the 2000s. But what about when the diaspora does not return home to India, or is set firmly in the landscape of the overseas space? And how can musical moments from such films help us to assess what is being represented in these instances?

MUSICAL NUMBERS IN THE 2000S

From the mid-2000s onwards the representation of the diaspora and homeland relationship can be seen to be changing in Bollywood cinema. The previous decade of the 1990s can be characterised as a return to post-war Bollywood cinema going in the overseas space, especially after a period of hiatus due to the arrival of VHS in the 1980s. Viewing Bollywood films at home on video, at a fraction of the cost of going to the cinema, temporarily halted Bollywood cinema-going in the UK (Dudrah 2002). The nineties decade of Bollywood cinema witnessed not only an increased focus on urban India-centred films but also diaspora or NRI-themed ones, aiding in the return to UK Bollywood cinema-going, but most often than not, these films would invariably promote an ideology of the homeland as culturally superior, not too dissimilar to the conservatism

of diaspora-themed films of the 1970s such as *Purab Aur Pachhim*.⁶ During the mid-2000s a shift can be noticed away from such conservatism towards more exploratory ideas about the diaspora as a space of representation in popular Hindi cinema. Reasons for such changes during this period include Bollywood cinema and its related creative industries travelling and interacting with global cultures and ideas outside India, and also depicting stories set within an urban India where conservative Indian cultural values are complicated, if not subverted altogether (Dudrah 2012: 10).

Notable films from this period, amongst others, include *Jhoom Barabar Jhoom* (*Dance Baby Dance*, 2007), *Dostana* (*Friendship*, 2008), and *Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara* (*You Only Live Once*, 2011). *Jhoom Barabar Jhoom*, a romantic comedy, is set entirely in London and only through a dream sequence played out through one musical number ('Bol Halke Halke'/'Whisper Softly Softly') does it return to India in the imagination of the romantic protagonists, but not in any way where India is a place for moral respite or conservatism. Its musical numbers are largely loud, drawing predominantly on the genre of *bhangra* music creating an energetic soundtrack that encourages flights of fancy and escape in the film's diegetic world. *Dostana*, a romantic comedy and perhaps Bollywood's first mainstream attempt at tackling the issue of homosexuality, is set in Miami, USA, with no return to India seen or heard anywhere in the diegesis. In fact, its two main places of settlement for diasporic Indians referenced in the film are Miami and London. Given its potentially risky topic, same-sex love and acceptance, during a time when homosexuality was still unlawful in India, the overseas space of Miami and locating the Indian diaspora there act as a safe space where titillations, eroticism and musical numbers that play out same-sex desires can be safely explored.

As we enter the 2010s, *Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara* marks the depiction of a highly mobile and 'new' diaspora and cosmopolitan audience, building on earlier films such as *Jhoom Barabar Jhoom* and *Dostana*, particularly in terms of topicality and testing on-screen boundaries further. *Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara*, a social drama that is set largely in Spain, includes mature themes around friendship and sex, features an explicit and long kiss centre frame, a fused Bollywood-Hollywood-European road trip aesthetic, and in the end it is far from clear that the characters, and by implication the audience, are encouraged to return to India—as was often the norm in NRI or diaspora films that were located overseas in earlier decades. The three male leads are seen literally running

for their lives in a thrilling scene in Pamplona, at a running of the bulls in the San Fermin festival; and there is a wedding song at the end of the film, but again the location is sunny, green and picturesque so it could still be in Spain or in India—but this is not confirmed and left open. The musical moments of *Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara* are eclectic and varied, including an international rock soundtrack, ambient trance music, a fused Hindi-Spanish bilingual song and dance number professing love, and mellow and transient music that export the characters to places and spaces in-between India and Spain, and then somewhere else; possibly new, as an amalgamation of these two constellations that cannot be easily located or named.

If, as in the discussion of the aforementioned films, we are able to see and hear scripts of possible Indian and diasporic lives as represented on screen in various ways, then through the workings of Bollywood films as popular culture in the diaspora these scripts are further recreated as diasporic South Asians take-up moments from the films in their everyday lives. The musical numbers from the films are particularly pertinent here as these are songs, music and lyrics that are, quite literally, taken up as scripts in the telling of contemporary diasporic stories. From multiple plays of Bollywood songs across the global airwaves of South Asian radio stations, to music videos featuring daily on music channels across satellite television, to online downloads and re-mixing of Bollywood music with other global genres, many South Asians have found a useful resource in popular Hindi cinema and its songs, music and dancing to punctuate and elaborate their everyday lives. One such instance where this occurs as a form of cultural politics to announce presence and celebrate a sense of selfhood is the LGBTQ club spaces in the diaspora. As in the homeland, where such spaces exist, queer *desis*⁷ also draw on the audio-visual cues offered by Bollywood cinema where they are replayed and reworked for the requirements of their gender and sexual identities. Furthermore, these identities are also having to be negotiated in relation to issues of race, belonging, culture and community, alongside other socio-cultural variables (see Dudrah 2006b; Khubchandani 2016).

In the UK context, for instance, musical numbers from *Jhoom Barabar Jhoom* (especially the *bhangra*-infused title track of the same name), *Dostana* (the ‘Maa da Ladla’/‘Mother’s Beloved’ and ‘Desi Girl’ songs), and the ‘Paint it Red’ track from *Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara* are played as urban anthems for UK South Asian LGBTQ audiences. In club spaces such as Club Kali in North London, where it states on its website

‘[...] where Eastern beats blend with Western classics since 1995’,⁸ in Club Zindagi in Manchester’s gay village which has been running since 2003,⁹ and at the Saathi Night in Birmingham since 2005,¹⁰ such musical numbers can be regularly heard and seen being danced to as queer patrons perform aspects of their identities on the dancefloor via the resources of the Bollywood musical number. An actual movement of the body in joy, pleasure and play occurs where local and global signifiers of the homeland and the diaspora, alongside other music and dance genres, are fused together to sing and dance and enjoy musical moments that transcend heteronormativity and create home anew, via queer gender and sexual identities in the diasporic club space.

CONCLUSION

The late 2000s and onwards is an interesting moment in time to bring this chapter to a close, particularly via the reading of the musical number ‘Dil Gira Dafatan’/‘My Heart Has Fallen Suddenly Somewhere’ from the film *Delhi 6* (2009), which further exemplifies complex cultural representations in the second type of homeland-diaspora film. This film can be seen as part of Bollywood cinema’s treatment of diaspora from earlier post-war years, except it is more in keeping with the latter post-2000s diaspora films that take a more nuanced and cosmopolitan approach to issues of the homeland and diaspora in local–global and inquisitive ways. Sai Bhatawadekar in her article on *Delhi 6* critically reads the film as demonstrating the possibilities of the local, global and transnational being mediated in a specific locality, such as Old Delhi, where one has to come to terms with these shifting, related and sometimes contradictory identities (Bhatawadekar 2011). Sai also offers a reading of the ‘Dil Gira Dafatan’ song to elaborate these points further, but focuses exclusively on the visual aspects of the song’s construction on-screen (ibid.: 254). She pays no attention to the musical features.

Delhi 6 tells the story of Roshan from the USA (Abhishek Bachchan) who accompanies his ailing grandmother *Dadi* (Waheeda Rehman) to their ancestral property in Old Delhi/Delhi 6. Upon his arrival, he gets to learn of his family’s troubled past (his mother had an inter-religious marriage and was shunned by her father), he spends time amongst the different religious and caste community of his neighbourhood, and meets and falls in love with the feisty Bittu (Sonam Kapoor). One evening during his stay, he falls asleep on the rooftop terrace of the family house

and awakes in the morning, in a dreamlike state, to deal with his varied feelings of love and belonging and adjusting to his new surroundings. This is where the musical number 'Dil Gira Dafatan' begins.¹¹

As Roshan awakens he sees the Statue of Liberty on the Delhi 6 skyline, adjacent to landmarks of Old Delhi, namely the Jama Masjid (a variation of this hybrid image is also illustrated in one of the film's publicity stills; see Fig. 7.3). This startles him somewhat at first, and as he gets up and goes for his daily walk through the narrow lanes of his neighbourhood, the Statue of Liberty is never far behind; in fact in one scene he looks over his shoulder only to see it again nestled in the frame amidst the crammed Old Delhi houses and overhead telephone wires. He smiles, as an acceptance overcomes him that this is his American identity and ideologies of individualism are perhaps ever present with him as he explores and discovers his Indian cultural roots. All the while, a soft 'Dil Mera' ('My Heart') repeats over gentle wind and string orchestral instruments, evoking a feeling of awakening of the mind and sensations in the body—a sort of affect of diaspora that moves between the homeland and the overseas space, sometimes simultaneously, in the highly localised experience of Delhi 6.

Roshan walks towards a large arch-shaped wooden double door, and while doing so the music and singing momentarily pause until he moves to push it open with both arms. The riff of the song begins to play on a banjo and as he walks through the door, which acts as a kind of portal to another dimension, we are transported to Times Square in New York, with Bittu standing in the centre of the frame, in the centre of Times Square, dressed in a white *shalwar kameez*, signifying her purity of heart and Roshan's growing love for her. But it is not the actual Times Square of New York City. It is a place that resembles it almost identically in terms of its street layout, skyscrapers and large hoardings, but it also has an Indian and Old Delhi 6 twist to it. There are not just yellow cabs and tourists filling this Times Square, there are also rickshaws, Indian cab drivers, tuk tuks, Indians on bicycles alongside New York yellow taxi cabs and tourists from around the world. As Roshan tries to move closer to Bittu, possibly to greet her on this new day, he is met instead by his Indian Hindu neighbour who has finished his morning prayers and offers him *parshad*/blessed sweets. Bittu disappears and through a series of swipe edits and fast jump cuts we move across this fantasy and hybrid Times Square seeing different aspects of the local and the cosmopolitanism that are on offer: hot jalebis being fried on the street by a Muslim vendor; sweet and savoury Indian snacks being sold on the sidewalk; a group of different ethnicities and a multi-faith crowd of people (nuns, Hindus,

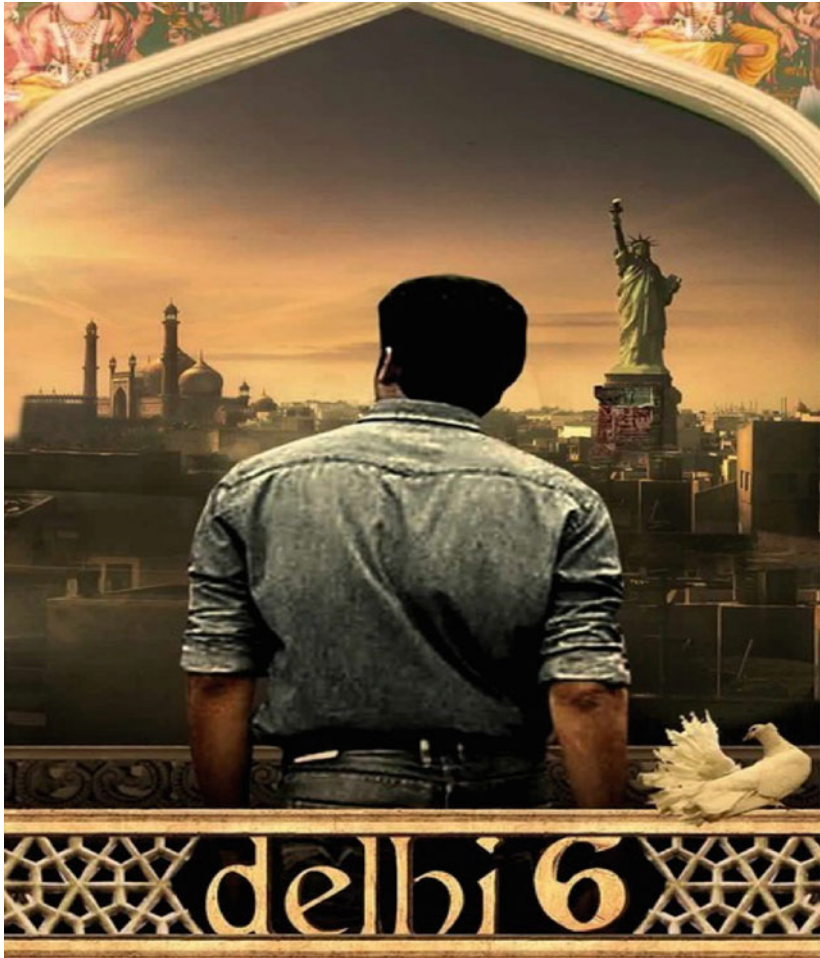


Fig. 7.3 A film publicity poster for *Delhi 6*. It features its main lead Roshan (Abhishek Bachchan) looking over and mediating an imagined Old Delhi skyline where the Jama Masjid can be seen alongside the Statue of Liberty in the same space (Courtesy of Showman Pictures, India)

Christians, Hare Krishnas, a Jewish man) who gather around a cow and offer prayers; the Hindu monkey god Hanuman flying through the air; an assembly of street performers break dancing on the street; a white dove that flies above the skyscrapers towards the top of the Empire State Building where a King Kong gorilla can be seen, etc. This highly eclectic and bricolage filled montage is given meaning through the transcending lyrics of love and longing, and a search for someone or someplace, or both:

Pearls are spilling from the lips of shells
 In the company of *ghazals*/poems, songs are becoming intoxicated
 The sea is sleeping under the sheet of waves
 But I am awake
 An intoxication is taking over me
 But you are unaware of it
 The weather is wrapped in fragrance
 My heart has suddenly fallen somewhere

These lyrics are accompanied by an international music score that is as much Indian as it is cosmopolitan, with western instruments playing alongside Indian ones, and even includes an Irish folkdance style of music played through violins to syncopate some of the varied moving images that are placed side by side, and even over and ahead of each other through dissolves and jump cuts. The music to this number was composed by Oscar Award winner Allah Rakha Rahman, known for his global sounds in his Bollywood film music compositions, and the lyrics were written by Prasoon Joshi in an Islamic Sufi style, with the song sung by the playback singers Ash King and Chinmayee Sripaada. Together, and under the film's direction by Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra, the musical number takes the lead protagonist and us, its viewers, on a reflexive journey through the homeland and diaspora spaces in a meditative and transient mode. Poetic Hindi-Urdu lyrics, with a Sufi feel to them, set us off on a quest about the divine (be that a higher truth as in religious terms, or finding a sense of divinity through earthly love) through the story of our on-screen lovers, or via the love for a place (whether it is Old Delhi or NYC, or both). This musical number is composed of and represents disjunctive shifts and connections between different actual and imagined socio-cultural sites in two cities across the diaspora-homeland space in dialogue with each other. Its musical moments have been visually crafted using CGI with actual location shooting, using a sizeable portion of the film's production budget that follows in a tradition of

song and dance production in Bollywood cinema where big budgets are often reserved for these sequences. Furthermore, the affect of desire, the multiple and complex lives of diaspora in motion through place, time and histories can be seen and heard here, and there are various scripts in play of new identities, of romance, of secret love, of memories of kith and kin, religion and mythology, local and global popular cultures, and an imagination that is able to take us to places across the homeland and the diaspora, and possibly in between and even beyond. These are scripts that are inspired by and taken up in spaces of the diaspora where South Asians, as well as others, use such musical numbers and their afterlives as part of their socio-cultural formations. In these ways, the homeland and diaspora relationship is not simply depicted as a linear one (i.e. from the homeland to the diaspora or vice versa), but perhaps it is one that is more complex and disjunctured. In effect, studies of Bollywood's musical numbers, and by extension other cinematic musical cultures, might do well to explore such relationships further.

NOTES

1. An earlier version of this chapter was presented as a keynote paper at 'When the Music Takes Over. Musical Numbers in Film and Television' Conference, University of Salzburg, 8–10 March 2018.
2. More recent scholarship developing debates in the sub-field of Bollywood film song and dance numbers have argued for and drawn attention to the moving and dancing body in song and dance or musical numbers as a just as important, if overlooked feature as songs, music and accompanying visuals (Iyer 2019). Dance musicality for Iyer becomes a useful way to explore related issues of stardom, gender and genre in the films through a focus on dance and music.
3. This musical number can be viewed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2nsPuUXwBI8>, date accessed 7 25 May 2021.
4. This musical number as part of the opening credits can be viewed at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g4IvXGs2_yQ, date accessed 25 May 2021.
5. Prior to *Purab Aur Pachhim*, Manoj Kumar's two very popular films were *Shabheed/Martyr* (1965) and *Upkar/Debt* (1967), the latter being written by Kumar and becoming his directorial debut film.
6. Two examples of very popular and successful films at the box office as cases in point include *Pardes (Foreign Land, 1997)* and *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham (Sometimes Happiness Sometimes Sadness, 2001)*.

7. Desis is a term used to refer to people of South Asian descent living abroad and having a sense of attachment to the homeland.
8. See the club's website at: www.clubkali.com, date accessed 25 May 2021.
9. See the club's website at: www.clubzindagi.com, date accessed 25 May 2021.
10. See the club's website at: www.saathinight.com, date accessed 25 May 2021.
11. This musical number can be viewed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5zU4zZpycTo>, date accessed 25 May 2021.

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The Afterlife of Continental Romance:
Musical Moments in Ichikawa Kon's *Passion
Without End* (1949) and *Fragrance
of the Night* (1951)

Junko Yamazaki

In the 1950s, Ichikawa Kon (1915–2008) directed a few critically acclaimed war films, among which are film adaptations of Takeyama Michio's children's novel *The Burmese Harp* (1956) and of Ōoka Shōhei's semi-autobiographical novel *Fires on the Plain* (1959).¹ The former was voted the fifth best film of the year by the major film magazine *Kinema Junpō* and won the San Giorgio Prize at the 1956 Venice Film Festival, and the latter was voted second best film of the year in *Kinema Junpō*'s 1959 annual poll and won the Golden Sail at the Locarno International Film Festival in 1961. While his lesser-known, lower-budget films from a slightly earlier period, *Hateshinaki jōnetsu* (*Passion without End*, 1949)

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and *Ieraishan* (*Fragrance of the Night*, 1951), do not engage the war directly, they offer fresh insights into the ways in which popular cinema in early post-war Japan addressed the physical, psychological, and social wounds of the war that were still fresh in audiences' minds. The two films are noteworthy for their intertextual relationship to the so-called continental films (*tairiku eiga*), a popular film genre during the Pacific War that featured 'the romantic adventures of Japanese people in China' (Raine 2018: 165), particularly in their use of popular songs known as 'continental melodies' (*tairiku merodei*) composed by Hattori Ryōichi.²

Understandably, the afterlife of 'continental films' in early post-war Japan has been the subject of critical suspicion. Film scholar Michael Baskett writes that 'the continuity in representations of Japan's empire in Asia did not end with what Japan scholars have termed the "collapse of empire"' (Baskett 2008: 144). Baskett argues that Japanese filmmakers' denouncement of the war during the U.S. occupation (1945–1952) was not accompanied by a critical engagement with the country's imperial ventures in Asia. As the Cold War and the nuclear arms race intensified, the U.S. shifted its strategic policy towards Japan (known as reverse course policy), moving priority away from the democratisation of the country towards turning it into a critical logistical base for the U.S. war effort. By 1950, the Japanese empire returned onscreen with 'a post-defeat spin' (Baskett 2008: 137).³ With no responsibility to engage post-liberated Asian audiences, Japanese filmmakers portrayed Japan's empire as a mere background against which 'a new Japanese history of the war' can be projected (*ibid.*). Moreover, wartime imperial audiovisual culture began to fill the post-war screen in place of the lost empire. '[T]he trope of miscegenetic melodrama', for instance, continued to be deployed to eroticise and fantasise the empire on the post-war screen, obscuring the brutal realities of Japan's imperial rule in Asia. Drawing on familiar tropes and motifs of wartime cinema, argues Baskett, Japanese cinema of the early 1950s 'helped revive nostalgia for the Japanese empire by taking audiences back to the pre-war era, not to commiserate or atone, but rather to watch and sing' (137). But does the repetition of the embodied practices of watching and singing necessarily produce nostalgia? How did early post-war Japanese cinema engage audiences in the drastically transformed socio-political environment by replaying wartime cinema's erotic fantasy?

The conditions of audiovisual memory have been radically altered in the age of technologically produced mass media. As music historian Berthold Hoeckner argues in his study of the relationship between

memory and film music, cinema with sound, especially with music, has become ‘the optical-acoustic unconscious’ that provides us with access in the form of cinematic experience to ‘something [...] we seem to have never experienced before we remember’ (Hoeckner 2019: 4–12). In this respect, every cinematic experience is sort of a replay of memory, but of a memory of the previously inaccessible, to which film music offers a sonic access.

Passion without End’s and *Fragrance of the Night*’s intertextual relationship to continental films and their replay of continental melodies are further complicated by these melodies’ narrative function. Affective commodities par excellence, the popularity of these melodies was something that a newly established Shin Toho Studio (1947–1961) could capitalise on.⁴ Ichikawa nonetheless skilfully incorporates these songs into the films’ narratives about the fate of wartime romance, replaying them to trigger the affective past in the characters’ post-war present. In her seminal monograph *Dreams of Difference, Songs of the Same: The Musical Moment in Film*, Amy Herzog writes that ‘the musical moment’ in the cinema presents ‘configurations of time and space completely unlike those found in other filmic works’ (2009: 2). Rather than masking the musical cinema’s penchant for structural and cultural repetitions, and hence its conservative tendency, the musical moment, Herzog contends, thrives on its capacity to ‘make palpable’ the tension between a ‘tendency to reproduce, standardize, and codify certain cultural fictions’ and ‘a transformative drive toward the not-yet-imagined’ (2009: 8, 14). Drawing on Hoeckner’s insights into film music and memory and Herzog’s notion of the musical moment, this chapter analyses musical moments in *Passion without End* and *Fragrance of the Night* in order to interrogate the *historicity* of early post-war Japan that the symptomatic reading of the same films forecloses. Rather than offering a reference point in linear historical time that the audience can look back on and be nostalgic about, I argue, the replay of these melodies in the films’ musical moments condenses time and produces an affective space where the past resurfaces in their narrations of the present and casts shadows into the future.

ICHIKAWA KON, YAMAGUCHI YOSHIKO, AND POST-WAR ROMANTIC MELODRAMA

Ichikawa’s career at Shin (New) Toho Studio was entangled with the cultural politics of the U.S. occupation policy. Between August 1945

and April 1952, Ichikawa directed seventeen films, thirteen out of which were produced partially or entirely by Shin Toho Studio. Following the commercial success of the two-part romantic melodrama *Sanbyaku-rokujūgo-ya* (*Three Hundred and Sixty-Five Nights*, 1948), Ichikawa mostly worked on the genre of melodrama at Shin Toho.⁵ When the occupation loosened censorship on films with Pacific War themes in 1950, the war began making its way back to the silver screen as a background for romantic melodramas (Howard 2016: 545). Censors did not take the combination of the war and romantic melodrama lightly, nor were they convinced by the supposed trivialisation of the war as a mere background.⁶ Tamura Tajiro's 1947 novel *Shunpu-den* (*A Tale of a Prostitute*), along with its film adaptation *Akatsuki no dasō* (*Escape at Dawn*, Taniguchi Senkichi, 1950), is a case in point.⁷ Set in a brothel in Tianjin, China, Tamura's story focuses on the physical, sexual and emotional intimacy between a low-ranking Japanese soldier and a Korean 'comfort woman' (a euphemism for a military sex slave). Despite its problematic romanticisation and eroticisation of the colonial relationship or even sexual slavery, *A Tale of a Prostitute* was one of the few early post-war works that dealt with the topic of comfort women. The novel was to be included in the inaugural issue of a literary journal, *Japanese Novels* (*Nihon Shōsetsu*), but its depiction of Korean comfort women was called into question when it was presented to the Press, Pictorial and Broadcast (PPB) division of the Civil Censorship Detachment (CCD) and was subsequently suppressed (Kerkham 2013: 167–168). Even though *Escape at Dawn*'s script that was submitted to CIE in September 1948 had already changed its female protagonist's ethnicity from Korean to Japanese, which critics viewed as an act of self-censorship, it went through several rewrites and a series of changes until it was finally accepted. In the film released in January 1950, the female protagonist was no longer a prostitute (not to mention military sexual slave) but a singer, and the military brothel was turned into a bar.

No actor embodies the pleasures and pains of romantic melodrama's entanglement with the war better than Yamaguchi Yoshiko who played the female protagonist in *Escape at Dawn*. Yamaguchi, formerly known as Ri Kōran in Japanese and as Li Xianglan in Mandarin, and later as Shirley Yamaguchi in English, was a transnational celebrity during the war. A substantial body of scholarship has explored her multilingual singing career and her mobile identity, her star persona during and after the war, and the complex reception of her music and films across the continent

over several decades, but her performance in ‘continental films’ is often considered to be the epitome of her audiovisual celebrity (Stephenson 1999; Wang 2005, 2007, 2012; Bourdaghs 2012b; Raine 2018). First introduced in Japan as a singer on Manchurian radio, she became famous in Japan as Ri Kōran for ‘her bewitching appearance and beautiful singing voice in *Byakuran no uta* (*Song of the White Orchid*, 1939)’, the first of the continental film trilogy in which she was paired with popular Japanese actor Hasegawa Kazuo (Raine 2018: 171–172). The second film, *Shina no yoru* (*China Nights*, 1940), and the third film, *Nessa no chikai* (*Vow in the Desert*, 1940), were both big hits but were disapproved by censors and severely condemned by critics. Though often mistakenly placed in the category of the ‘national-policy film’ (*kokusaku eiga*) and read as ‘an allegory of Japanese government policy toward China’, the continental trilogy was part of the entertainment cinema which was ‘attacked for its promotion of decadent, westernized culture and its pandering to film fans’ and came under government pressure after the Film Law was passed in 1939 (Raine 2018: 175). All of the three films featured Ri’s performance of ‘continental melodies’, a music genre that flourished in the context of the Japanese colonial expansion into, and occupation of, the Asian continent (Pope 1993; Bourdaghs 2012b).

Musical films being the most popular genre of Japanese cinema in wartime Shanghai and especially Beijing, *China Nights* derives much of its affective power from Ri’s strong, multilingual musical performance—of Japan’s counterfeit Chinese music. Michael Raine regards *China Nights*’s surprising popularity in occupied Shanghai in 1943 as an example of a ‘disaffiliated reading formation’ that a transnational and transmedia wartime popular culture facilitated (2018: 164). Raine emphasises the importance of a ‘more immediate affective intertext’ for understanding the 1943 Shanghai reception over the dominant allegorical reading of the film, reminding us that ‘the stakes and objects of affiliation were less obvious’ for audiences than the allegorical reading assumes (190). The film’s ‘powerful but ambiguous images of power imbalance’, he argues, provided for Shanghai audiences in 1943 both a ‘respite from politics’ and an ‘emotional matrix’ for coming to terms with the traumatic experience of defeat and occupation (193, 189, 168). In short, grand narratives of resistance and revolution are inadequate for grasping the affective investments of the film’s contemporary audience.

The continental trilogy serves as an intertext for *Passion without End* and *Fragrance of the Night*, and music as a source of affective power

constitutes a significant element of continuity between them. But while the trilogy might have conjured up ‘fantasies of co-prosperity’ for audiences in wartime Japan, what *Passion without End* and *Fragrance of the Night* offered audiences in early post-war Japan under the U.S. occupation might be more comparable to the ambivalent affective space that Raine argues *China Nights* provided for Shanghai audiences in 1943. As I show in the following paragraphs, the musical moments of these films surely evoke the memory of the colonial fantasy, and yet at the same time they also heighten an awareness of the unsustainability of the fantasy and the peril of carrying the memory of the fantasy into the historical present. In both films, the difficulty of unlearning the fantasy is dialectically related to a painful awareness of irretrievable loss and precarious belonging to a post-war society on the one hand, and an uncertainty of the future on the other hand.

PASSION WITHOUT END AND A DREAM LEFT IN THE CONTINENT

In the climactic scene of *Passion without End*, the composer-protagonist Miki is about to commit suicide after learning that the woman whom he secretly admired passed away. His wife Shin arrives just in time, but he tells her to give up on him and confesses his secret admiration for the woman who did not even know his name. Broken-hearted, but in a surprise twist, Shin expresses sympathy for him: after all, they have both suffered from unrequited love. She tries to hold on to a glimmer of hope for a new beginning of their life together and reminds him of his other passion—music. But Miki finds little or no consolation in her words and buries his head in his hands. He tells her that he has no more songs to write, as his lifelong dream has died.

As Miki delivers that line, a symphonic version of the song ‘Soshū yakyoku’ (‘Suzhou Serenade’) enters non-diegetically. Shin rushes over to him, kneels and puts her hands on his lap. ‘No, even if you give up on composition, songs won’t leave you. Your heart soon will be filled with songs again’, she says quietly but firmly, leading to a cut of a close-up of the two.⁸ But after a long pause, in which she looks away and then back to him, she adds in a whisper, ‘...with sad songs’. She continues her plea, telling him that he does not need to forget about the woman, nor does he have to reciprocate Shin’s love for him. She begs him to just stay alive and to let her be with him. But the sweet melody of ‘Suzhou Serenade’

fades out, and Miki raises his head to look at her only to quickly put it back down. As he holds his head in agony, an upbeat, brass-heavy tune enters, and the scene abruptly cuts to a night club where his old friend Fukuko, played by Kasagi Shizuko, is about to perform Kasagi's post-war hit song 'Boogie Woogie Girl'.

The abrupt transition between the two scenes violently fuses the otherwise disparate narrative impulses of early post-war Japan, one melancholic, to borrow Ilit Ferber's words, 'self-destructive loyalty to the lost object' (2013: 20) and the other an exuberant pursuit of 'bodily pleasure as means to liberation' (Bourdagh 2012a: 43). While the tunes of 'Suzhou Serenade' and 'Boogie Woogie Girl' set the affective registers of the two scenes apart from each other, the two scenes also have something in common: their composer Hattori Ryōichi who served as the film's music supervisor.

Passion without End's soundtrack is in fact made up of as many as seven songs composed by Hattori between 1937 and 1949. The film imparts narrative significance to some of these songs by treating them as songs composed by the protagonist Miki. Despite a disclaimer in the opening credits that the film is not a biopic of Hattori, it is tempting to see him as the model for Miki, the composer-protagonist, or at least regard those diegetic songs as historical reference points. It is difficult, for instance, to dissociate the song 'Suzhou Serenade'—the song Hattori composed for Ri Kōran for her role in *China Nights*—from Hattori's musical aspiration and work in the genre of 'continental melodies', many of which were popularised by Ri Kōran during the war.⁹ But with its 'revisionist' take on the timeline of Hattori's compositions, the film attributes the inspiration for the songs featured in the film—except 'Suzhou Serenade' and 'Sekohan musume' ('Second-Hand Girl') from the first scene—to Lady Odagiri whom Miki came to admire after meeting her once during his excursion outside the city, erasing the songs' historical origins and significance.¹⁰ The film's revisionist, ahistorical narrative about these songs serves as the basis for the protagonist's fatalist, depoliticised view of history, and his indulgence in the 'masochistic erotics of doom' in which the past is repeated compulsively in the present and the present is reduced to what returns in the cycle (Luhr 2012: 6).¹¹ In the absence of other explicit temporal markers in the film, 'Suzhou Serenade' stands out as being the only song where history and fiction clearly converge through the euphemism of the 'dream left in the continent'. In the light of this convergence, the song's intertextual reference to the wartime continental

films and their ideologically loaded depiction of romance enable the fate of Miki's romance(s) in early post-war Japan to carry historical weight in the early post-war present.

The significance of 'Suzhou Serenade' for the film's narration of the past is established much earlier in the film when the song acts as a catalyst for an extended flashback through which the film tells the afterlife of the dream in early post-war Japan. After the opening credits, the film takes us right into the suicide scene where Shin has just arrived at their apartment. The heavy rain outside, together with the film's noir-style lighting that captures the two figures in dark silhouette, invokes a sense of entrapment and hopelessness. Looking out of the window at the rain, Miki begins to recount his past and laments his fate. The shot cuts to a view from the outside, showing him standing behind the window as his monologue continues in the voice-over narration. The camera pans to the left, across a cityscape dissolving into another as Miki's disembodied voice travels back in time and narrates his wishful longing and fantasy, how music became a means to express his frustrations, and that his futile search even led him to China—referred to as 'the continent' (*tairiku*)—where he yet found no consolation. The melody of 'Suzhou Serenade' accompanies his voice-over narration and melancholic retelling of his wartime romantic adventure. After his failed adventure, Miki finds himself back in Japan, alone in his dingy apartment with no other place to return to.

The film flashes back three years earlier. After a few dissolves, the camera passes through the blinds and moves to a close-up of a woman hiding her face behind a fan. The woman is no other than Yamaguchi Yoshiko/Ri Kōran. As Yamaguchi reveals herself, her face is lit up to emphasise her glamour, and she begins to sing her wartime hit song 'Suzhou Serenade'. By turning the non-diegetic recorded music into a diegetic live performance and thus bringing the audience back in time, Yamaguchi's onscreen performance brings the past back to life. Abstracted from its surroundings and not yet fully integrated into the flow of the narrative, her performance initially occupies an ambiguous space in the film's supposedly post-war narrative, re-enacting Yamaguchi/Ri's wartime celebrity.

A following wide shot provides a context for Yamaguchi's performance by spotting her on the stage at a cabaret hall that Miki provides his music for. Ian Conrich and Estella Tincknell define a musical moment as 'an isolated musical presence in a non-musical film which is most notable for its potential to disturb the text through its unexpectedness or at

times excessiveness' (Conrich and Tincknell 2006: 2). But emphasising its double articulation, they also argue that the musical moment does not simply disrupt the narrative flow but helps articulate the film's underlying values and ideas in a new way. Yamaguchi's cameo appearance and her 'live' performance of 'Suzhou Serenade' indeed do more than disrupt the narrative with an erotic spectacle and a familiar music: they at once foreground the theme of romance vis-à-vis continental films and undercut its affective optimism. By inserting shots of a hostess smoking by the staircase leading to the hall and others inside waiting for customers in the middle of Yamaguchi's performance, the film draws a stark contrast between Yamaguchi's sexual aura and vitality and those hostesses' '*kyodatsu* condition' of exhaustion and despair, and between her upward, dreamy gaze, and their empty expression.¹² Cut to a young host looking for something, the camera follows him backstage. With 'Suzhou Serenade' playing in the background, he approaches a girl—Miki's future wife Shin—from behind. As Shin vehemently rejects his advance and flees the scene, the background music ceases abruptly and ends what appears to be a caricature of the romantic encounter described in the serenade. Shin storms into the kitchen where Miki is seen getting wasted, and accidentally breaks his guitar string. The cook who was with him back in the continent tells her and the host that the song is 'the dream he [Miki] left in the continent', further evoking the sense of loss.

I now return to the climactic scene of the film discussed at the beginning of this section. We listen to 'Suzhou Serenade' for the second time as the film completes its flashback, returning us to the suicide scene. The replay recalls Miki and Shin's first encounter during Yamaguchi's performance of the song in the cabaret hall as discussed in the previous paragraph, specifically the allure of its fantasy Shin fell for. In the final scene following the climactic one, Miki is seen walking on the seashore and suddenly collapses. A close-up of Lady Odagiri—the source of musical inspiration for Miki who died from an undisclosed cause—and then of Shin are superimposed over the waves washing up on the shore. He hears Shin's voice telling him that his heart will soon be filled with songs again—with sad songs. He buries his face in a sheet of a music score and weeps, while a symphonic variation of 'Tokyo Boogie Woogie', the theme song of the film *Haru no kyōen* (*Spring Banquet*, 1947) also composed by Hattori, grows louder in the background. Miki raises his head. The film closes by cutting to an extreme long shot of the sunrise over the horizon.

Hattori indeed continued to compose songs even after his return from Shanghai, some of which are now considered to be iconic songs of the post-war period. But rather than melancholically searching for the blue flower across the sea, many of his early post-war songs were grounded in the impoverished material conditions of post-war Japan, addressing them in comical and satirical ways, and their tunes were more upbeat and energetic (Bourdagh 2012b: 181).¹³ The climactic scene links ‘Suzhou Serenade’ (1940) and ‘Boogie Woogie Girl’ (1949)—two songs that were composed and released almost a decade apart—in a narrative sequence, with the dramatic effect of the latter unchaining the audience from the circular structure of doomed romance. It is as if Kasagi Shizuko’s overblown, hyper-energetic performance has to blow off the melancholic overtones of the previous era within the present. But the film’s ending does not quite resolve its musical themes into a unified voice. The echo of sadness in Shin’s voice and Miki’s sob remain present, adding a dissonance to the choral finale of ‘Tokyo Boogie Woogie’ and its celebration of the new era.

FRAGRANCE OF THE NIGHT AND AFFECTIVE REORIENTATION

Fragrance of the Night (1951) is another story of a doomed romance that explores the afterlife of continental romance in early post-war Japan. The film title *Ieraishan* (*Fragrance of the Night*) was derived from ‘Ye lai xiang’, ‘a light jazz dance tune in the style of rumba’, composed by Li Jinguang (1907–1993) in 1944 (Farrer and Field 2015: 130). Yamaguchi (then as Li Xianglan/Ri Kōran) recorded the song with Pathé-EMI Shanghai in 1944 and performed the song at the concert titled ‘Ye lai xiang Rhapsody’ conducted by Hattori and Chen Gexing in June 1945. The song became an instant hit (Wang 2012: 156). Victor Records released the Japanese version of the song with Yamaguchi in January 1950, a year before the film’s release, consistent with the ‘priority of sound over sight’, which was characteristic of her rise to stardom during the war (Raine 2018: 171). Unlike ‘Suzhou Serenade’, the song was not featured in wartime continental films. Nonetheless, the song is regarded as an example of the post-war revival of Yamaguchi’s wartime songs in Japan which played a crucial role in enabling the sentimentalisation of Japan’s imperial experience (Baskett 2008: 142–144; Wang 2012: 155–156).¹⁴

Yiman Wang goes further, arguing that these songs performed a ‘therapeutic function’ (156). She writes, ‘[T]he melodies seemed to be stored in the physical bodies that had survived the war and imperial egomania’, and ‘[b]y reactivating the physically ingrained melodies, these surviving bodies learned to restore their relationship with the past, thereby reorienting themselves vis-à-vis the changed environment’ (156). For Wang, ‘[t]he postwar reprisal of Li’s wartime songs in Japan’ enabled an affective reorientation towards Japan’s imperial past, ‘one aligned with imperial nostalgia’ (156). While embodiment seems to be central to Wang’s understanding of music and memory, there is a conspicuous lack of discussion about what she refers to as ‘surviving bodies’ and how their conditions might have affected the melodies they stored, retrieved and reactivated. In this respect, *Fragrance of the Night* offers a critical perspective, bringing to the fore the physical and moral crises of the gendered bodies in post-war Japan, and suggesting that affective reorientation was far from complete in the early 1950s. What is more, I argue that the film’s use of the song is anti-therapeutic. Rather than reconstituting a ‘fantasmatic body, which offers a support as well as a point of identification for the subject addressed by the film’, and projecting unity and subjective coherence, the film lends its own cinematic body to the sensorial experience of a ghost of the empire, highlighting its disjunctive and de-centering nature through the non-diegetic sound of ‘Ye lai xiang’ (Doane 1980: 33–34).

The film’s protagonists Akiko and Seki meet in North China towards the end of the war, while the former is working as a comfort woman and the latter as an army doctor. Despite the deteriorating state of the war, they quickly fall in love. One night, a sudden air raid turns their romantic rendezvous into an action spectacle, turning the song ‘Ye lai xiang’ into a multi-sensory metonym and mnemonic of their romance. While hiding in a small hole in the ruins, Seki detects a sweet scent in the air which he immediately associates with Akiko. Akiko corrects him, saying that it is *ye lai xiang*, pointing at the flowers glowing in the moonlight. A light instrumental version of the song ‘Ye lai xiang’ is played in the background, creating a sonorous and sensual envelope for their romance to glow on the silver screen. A fleeting moment of happiness and aesthetic fulfilment lasts a few seconds until the bombs blast it away.

Following an elliptical fade-out, a superimposed title ‘Kobe in 1950’ appears over a daytime cityscape. The abrupt transition here is reminiscent of the sonic transition from ‘Suzhou Serenade’ to ‘Boogie Woogie Girl’ in *Passion without End* discussed earlier. The camera tracks back and

pans right to reveal Seki now working as a supervisor at a pharmaceutical company's laboratory. By showing his junior colleague requesting that he look through the microscope, the film establishes Seki's authority in the lab and associates it with the power of sight. But the film does so only to take this power away from him. After establishing the connection between light and vision on the one hand, and post-war modernity and enlightenment on the other hand, Ichikawa adopts the noir style to portray the murky side of post-war society. In contrast with the brightly-lit high-rise office building in which Seki's company is located, black-market broker Kameyama's dingy office, located underneath the elevated railway tracks, is the locus of the film noir motifs of darkness, cynicism, and despair as well as of illicit transactions which were prevalent in early post-war Japan. Extending his deployment of the noir style to the sound design, Ichikawa foreshadows Seki's tragic death on train tracks at the end of the film through train sounds. But more importantly, the scenes in Kameyama's office—the noises and vibrations made by the frequent passing of the trains, accompanied by the flickering effects of a ceiling lamp—bear an uncanny resemblance to the bombing scene earlier in the film. The mimetic and auratic continuity between the two scenes thus adds a historical and allegorical meaning to the personal tragedy.

We soon learn that Seki has not forgotten Akiko; he had moved to her hometown Kobe and has been looking for her for the past five years. One day he visits Kameyama, who claims to know Akiko's whereabouts, only to find out that Kameyama actually has no clue whatsoever. As he leaves the broker's office, we hear the soft refrain of 'Ye lai xiang', The song 'reprojects' the romance onto the post-war cityscape in vain (Hoeckner 2019: 68).

Music haunts and takes over as Seki's power of sight eclipses. When informed by a physician that he will soon lose his eyesight from the bomb blast that put an end to his wartime rendezvous with Akiko, Seki drops his pocketbook in shock. The doctor picks it up for him and asks what is inside. Seki answers, 'It's *ye lai xiang*'. A brief refrain of 'Ye lai xiang' accompanies a dissolve into a long shot of Seki standing at a wharf. The next shot shows him covering his eyes with his hands. After a farewell visit to his lab, Seki wanders around the city and finds shelter in a café bar from the rain. 'Ye lai xiang' plays in the background as unobtrusive ambient music. It gradually gets louder, and its melodic refrain coincides with the moment in which Akiko spots Seki, the discovery punctuated by a forward zoom towards Seki and followed by Akiko's monologue. The

source of the music in this scene is ambiguous, but its effect is powerful. For one, the refrain's mnemonic power enables the audience to recall the earlier scene of romance. But insofar as the music was part of a post-war reality that the characters in the film and the film's contemporary audiences shared, it could have been easily heard diegetically even without a visual proof of the sound source. In fact, we later hear Akiko humming the tune. The music also seems to be part of the focalisation effect that allows the audience to feel the moment with Akiko. In other words, the cinematic refrain does not only reproject meanings created in earlier scenes, but rather, it projects an aesthetic dream yet to be fulfilled by engaging the characters' and audience's presents and creating a slippage between the two.

If the café scene takes the form of a promise of affective reorientation vis-à-vis the reunion of the couple and sensory immersion, the scene that follows highlights the difficulty of keeping the promise. When Seki fails to return Akiko's awaiting gaze, it takes only a few seconds for her to realise that the problem is not with his memory but with his eyesight. Instead of addressing him on the spot, she quietly follows him to the wharf where he presumably visits to remember the time spent on the continent across the water. Yamaguchi's singing voice accompanies their walk, in anticipation of their reunion. The lyrics of the song explicitly link *ye lai xiang* flowers to romantic love as Seki longingly looks out at the sea. When Akiko stands in front of him, the music prosthetically enhances his sight, as it were, bringing an image of Akiko into focus.

The film's musical moments at once celebrate the phantasmagoric experience of cinematic romance and question its sustainability. As Seki and Akiko embrace each other, the film replays the song's thematic line, taking us back to the original scene through a flashback. As Hoeckner writes, 'the cinematic refrain not only reprojects meanings created in synchresis, but also takes on, whenever repeated, new images for later reprojection' (2019: 68). The original scene of romance may indulge audiences in nostalgic sentiments, but its replay—the flashback—highlights the gap between the past and the present, showing Akiko and Seki keenly aware of the gap that generates both the pleasures and pains of remembering. Neither of them is able to answer the question, 'Were you happy?', so they try to embrace the moment by telling each other to forget about 'bad things'. Seki pretends that his vision problem is only minor; Akiko lies about her profession, claiming that she is a telephone

operator. In reality, she has not been able to leave her old trade and works at a cabaret hall.

Both Akiko and Seki may have survived the war, but their ‘surviving bodies’, to borrow Wang’s phrase, are shown to be discordant with the song’s idealised image of ephemeral romance that they once cherished. Seki faints at the scene, and an abrupt cut to the cabaret hall reveals Akiko’s real occupation and that she has not been able to keep her promise of finding a ‘proper job’ upon her return to Japan. Furthermore, the continuity between wartime and post-war Japan inscribed in their bodies, or rather, both literal and figurative wounds that their bodies carried over into the post-war era, seems to make their reorientation vis-à-vis the presumably new environment of post-war Japan impossible. Seki’s physical and psychic wound is shown to be irrevocable while Akiko turns to street prostitution in the hope that she can save Seki’s eyes. Despite Akiko’s efforts to make up for their loss and have a fresh start, Seki chooses to leave her and to sacrifice himself by helping Kameyama with his dodgy business in order to post bail for Toshio, his former subordinate in the army. The song ‘Ye lai xiang’ takes on a more ironic meaning as the story progresses and the disparity between the melancholic longing of the song and the reality confronted by the characters widens, with repetitive performances also counteracting the ephemerality of romance that the Japanese lyrics emphasises. The solo wind instrument (probably clarinet) variation played in the scene where Akiko is seen attempting to attract a customer on the street, breaks the arc of the original melody by a chromatic succession with a Spanish-inflected ornamentation, reflecting a troubling means-to-an-end relationship, her willingness to sell her body to sustain the romantic fantasy.

Kameyama takes advantage of Seki’s request not to tell Toshio about where the bail money came from, and deceives Toshio into thinking that it was Kameyama who bailed him out. Kameyama asks Toshio to return the favour by helping him steal goods from a freight train. Upon learning Kameyama’s scheme, Seki heads out to the train station to stop Toshio. On his way, Seki makes a brief stop at Akiko’s apartment. In response to her plea to build a life together, he promises that this time he will return to her, though his exchange with Akiko’s friend in the hallway suggests that he probably will not come back. When Seki arrives at the station before dawn, Kameyama and Toshio are about to go into action. Still hesitant to tell Toshio the truth, Seki walks towards them in the middle of the railroad tracks and tries to convince Toshio to go home.

He gets pushed away by Kameyama and falls. Kameyama hurries Toshio into carrying goods down from the freight train. Seki clammers to his feet in order to follow them but falls onto the train tracks. In desperation, he finally tells Toshio the truth that he paid the bail. The off-screen sound of a locomotive horn announces the arrival of a train. After a brief pause, Toshio realises that he has been deceived. As Toshio grabs Kameyama in rage, the engine sound of a steam locomotive gets louder. Cut to a long shot of Toshio and Kameyama getting into a fight in the foreground: they appear oblivious to the train approaching in the background.

In the final scene, rather than giving audiences an aesthetic experience that reunites the two lovers, the soundtrack of the film creates a formal and affective discordance between the two. Toshio's scream in terror gets drowned out by the sounds of the train, followed by an abrupt cut to a shot of the window of Akiko's room taken from outside the apartment building. Akiko opens the window and looks out. Unaware of Seki's tragic death, she appears hopeful for his return. The refrain of 'Ye lai xiang' brings back the now haunting melody of romantic love as perpetually deferred, unfulfilled longing. The fantasy meets its own end in the final image of the film—a *ye lai xiang* flower that fell out of Seki's pocket-book onto the railroad track—an overt-literal rendering of the lyrics of the song, 'the dream of romantic love fades away, leaving *ye lai xiang* behind' (see Fig. 8.1).

CONCLUSION

Quite rightly, critics call into question the revival of the transnational celebrity Yamaguchi Yoshiko/Ri Kōran/Li Xianglan's wartime songs and the emergence of films reminiscent of continental films towards the end of the U.S. occupation of Japan. But a closer look at the two films, *Passion without End* and *Fragrance of the Night*, with special attention to their musical moments and their historically situated re-articulations of the imperial fantasy, reveals a more ambivalent relationship to the imperial fantasy of the recent past. Through their intertextual relationship to continental films and their replay of continental melodies, musical moments in both films constitute a reflexive engagement with the historical present of the late occupation years. 'Suzhou Serenade' in *Passion without End* articulates the tension between the haunting presence of the fantasy ('a dream left in the continent') and the post-war reality that betrays it. *Fragrance of*



Fig. 8.1 A *ye lai xiang* flower on the train tracks, *Ieraishan* (Courtesy of Shin Toho Pictures, Japan)

the Night's musical moments and replays of 'Ye lai xiang' trace the disintegration of the phantasmagoric experience of cinematic romance in the face of the physical and moral crises of the 'surviving bodies' in post-war Japan. Though I do not offer an empirical account of how the replays of wartime continental melodies affected individual members of the audience in early post-war Japan, I hope that my analysis of these films shows that it is a more complex one than 'restor[ing] their relationship with the past' (Wang 2012: 156). If these films and others from the period fall short of the expectations of dominant critical practices and of cultural politics today, providing a deeper understanding of their historicity is the first step in rethinking the relation of the past to our present.

NOTES

1. Japanese names are written surname first, macrons are used to denote long vowels, and Japanese words in the text are italicized. Exceptions are individuals well known in the West or authors who have adopted the Western order of surname last in their English publications.
2. On ‘continental melodies’ (*tairiku merodei*), please see Bourdaghs (2012b).
3. Building on Kyoko Hirano (1992)’s work, Christopher Howard also notes that ‘from 1950 the Occupation also began to allow a limited number of films with a Pacific War theme.’ See note 43 in Howard (2016).
4. Following the second union strike at Toho, a group of actors and filmmakers left Toho Shin and founded Shin (New) Toho in 1947. Ichikawa was among the assistant directors who left Toho. For more information about Shin Toho, please see Sharp (2011: 220–222).
5. For Ichikawa’s filmography in English, please see Quandt (2001: 429–437).
6. Sociologist and media historian Shunya Yoshimi doubts that occupation censorship actually achieved any consistent ideological effect due to its inconsistency. But ‘precisely as a result of this inconsistency’, he writes, ‘media producers came ultimately to exercise a certain degree of “self-constraint” or “self-censorship”’. See Yoshimi (2003: 252).
7. It is one of the most well-documented cases of film censorship during the U.S. occupation. See Hirano (1992: 87–95) and Kerkham (2013: 153–175).
8. All English translations of the dialogues in *Passion without End* and *Fragrance of the Night* are my own.
9. The song was originally composed for Yamaguchi Yoshio (then Ri Kōran) to sing in the 1940 film *Shina no yoru*, but she did not release a record of her performance until 1953. Victor Records first produced a record with two other singers, Watanabe Hamako and Kirishima Noboru, in 1940. The performance discussed in this chapter is Yamaguchi’s in the film *Passion without End* released in 1949.
10. For instance, ‘Yoru no purattohōmu’ (‘Nighttime on the Station Platform’) was originally recorded by Awaya Noriko for the film *Tōkyō josei* (*The Woman of Tokyo*) in 1939, but its release was banned by wartime censors. Awaya also makes a cameo appearance in the film.
11. I am borrowing William Luhr’s description of film noir’s appeal here.
12. On ‘*kyodatsu* conditions’ in early post-war Japan, see Dower (1999: 87–120).
13. See also Nagahara (2017).
14. Both Baskett and Wang discuss the song in the context of Inagaki Hiroshi’s 1952 film *Shanghai no onna* (*Woman of Shanghai*), which features Yamaguchi as a singer in a popular nightclub in Shanghai.

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- ‘Tokyo bugiugi’ (‘Tokyo Boogie Woogie’). 1948. Kasagi Shizuko (pf.). Hattori Ryōichi (comp.). Suzuki Masaru (lyrics). © Columbia Records.

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Redemption Songs: Musical Moments in Joseph Gäi Ramaka's *Karmen Gei* (2001) and Flora Gomes's *Nha Fala* (2002)

Yifen Beus

OVERTURE

Ousmane Sembène, nicknamed the 'Father of African Cinema', famously likened the African filmmaker to the traditional storyteller *griot*, who plays musical instruments, sings, advises, critiques and narrates (Pfaff 2004: 40). To imbed cultural specifics in cinema as a means of modern-day storytelling, African filmmakers regularly feature traditional musical instruments and music. As Ian Conrich and Estella Tincknell point out, the 'musical moment' in cinema functions as a 'point of disruption[...]to disturb the text through its unexpectedness or at times expressiveness' (2006: 4). Music's and musical numbers' potential to disrupt in African films also has its own paradoxically territorialising and at once deterritorialising effects in that they modernise culturally specific storytelling

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mechanisms while diversifying visual representations and pushing genre boundaries. They also allow the filmmaker to reflexively codify cinematic spaces not only to authenticate and heighten a particular film's characters and *mise-en-scène*, often breaking the dramatic illusion, but also to underscore larger themes as artistic and/or social commentary. The musical, among all mainstream film genres, benefits from its stable formal construct as a form of entertainment and artistic expression, while serving the above-mentioned purposes of a *griot's* craft.

Drawing on Gilles Deleuze's and Félix Guattari's notion of the 'refrain' as a theoretical departure, Amy Herzog analyses the different musical references, allusions and adaptations in a 'flexible text that has quite fixated themes and character traits' from the well-known story of *Carmen* (Herzog 2009: 73–75). Senegalese director Joseph Gai Ramaka's 2001 *Karmen Gei* and Guinean-Bissau filmmaker Flora Gomes's 2002 *Nha Fala* are the first African musical films that dramatise these themes of rebellion, liberation, cultural identity and feminine empowerment through their 'musical moments' and foreground the musical component as an essential accompaniment to the modern *griot's* storytelling instrument, the camera. They exemplify the intended fusion and alteration of Africa's traditional musical practices and Hollywood's musical genre conventions in demystifying and mobilising an Africa typically depicted and stereotyped in such colonial narratives as Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* or the *Indiana Jones* series.

Instead of comparing the two filmmakers' roles in their respective nations' cinematic traditions, this chapter examines these two films' 'musical moments' and what Phil Powrie calls the 'crystal-song' among these moments (Powrie 2017: 4–5), where the films' underlining themes of freedom and postcolonial identity are heightened and eventually solidified to magnify the protagonists' politicised self-agency, a most analysed character trait of the heroines (Powrie 2004; Prabhu 2012). The songs' transforming power, most evident in their sociopolitical implications, is also manifested in these moments, often staged according to similar aesthetic conventions of the musical genre. Using a term coined by Bob Marley, I call these crucial musical numbers 'redemption songs':

Won't you help to sing
 These songs of freedom?
 'Cause all I ever have
 Redemption songs...
 Emancipate yourselves from mental slavery
 None but ourselves can free our minds....

The protagonists' redemption does not necessarily refer to their literal escape from death in the end. On the contrary, they are redeemed, through their voice and song, from being enslaved in a narrative as well as sociopolitical context that subjugates them. Although both films are intentionally textualised with rampant death motifs, Marley's powerful lyrics nonetheless best describe the redemptive and resurrective nature of the protagonists' actions, which epitomise Africa's own continual struggles for economic and cultural liberation and self-determination, a desire not only of the protagonists but also of the filmmakers as storytellers, advocating for their people and communities. These themes repeatedly resurface in African films, but despite and also because of the opposite outcomes and tones of these two case narratives—one tragic and the other comic—their 'redemption songs' illustrate the paradoxical workings of musical practices in these films that can both be fixated and flexible, as argued by Herzog. That is, these song sequences provide consistency and somewhat predictable patterns in genre and textual analysis, but they can also subvert and destabilise the familiar and often expected regularity in their musical 'refrains' when adapted in culturally and rhythmically different contexts. Thus such toying with the musical genre's recognisable conventions further enables creativity and artistic license for staging song and dance in cinematic applications, while at the same time adhering to the *griot's* efficacy advocated by Sembène in telling African stories. Ramaka's and Gomes's choice of the musical genre was clearly an innovative move to indigenise cinema within the Sembenian framework.

ACT I: THE *GRIOT*, SONG AND CINEMA

Although the earliest descriptions of the *griot* by Arabs and Africans were sketchy and largely based on secondhand accounts, in his seminal work *Griots and Griottes*, Thomas A. Hale writes that according to a most common origin theory, the term *griot* came from the French *guiriot*, which first appeared in 1637 and refers to traditional storytellers or oral historians originated in West Africa.¹ Despite the many functions and roles *griots* and *griottes* have played, 'praise-singer' is by far the most obvious choice to designate their job description as it is the most 'audible manifestation of their profession'.² This audible aspect of their profession synthesises their verbal and musical arts that are indispensable in the roles they play in society.

To illustrate the inseparable nature of these two aspects of the *griot's/griotte's* work, Hale relates a story about American linguist Charles Bird, who was researching Bamana syntax but was struck by the force of music in the words of a *jeli* (*griot* in the Mande region).

I wanted language to analyze syntactically. The music was interfering a lot. [...] I couldn't use the data. I asked him to come back without the instrument. This time he drummed on the table. He needed something to drive his language. That struck me—there was an organizing force in the language. (Hale 1998: 146)

Although not everything the *griot* does is accompanied by music, this instance demonstrates the close integration of music into the verbal art in the Mande oral culture. This influence has extended from Western Africa to world music (Hale 1998: 147–148), and is purposely foregrounded in *Karmen Gei* and *Nha Fala*.

Both *griots* and *griottes* share this attribute in their vocal performance despite the fact that musical instruments used by these cultural performers in their trade bear gender discrimination in practice and training traditionally. Nevertheless, due to the usage of the feminine version of the term, *griottes*, one can assume that female wordsmiths were active players of the profession in West Africa (Hale 1998: 16). However, Hale argues that traditional gender and class biases have rendered little information about the *griottes* to scholars and researchers. Only recently did more data appear about these marginalised verbal performers. In particular, Aïssata Sidikou's research on women singers has shed more light on their profession and training compared with their male counterparts. One basic difference between the two genders' training is their respective mobility or immobility, as men had greater opportunities to travel than women (Hale 1998: 217–243).³

This difference in physical mobility becomes a contesting theme of entrapment and liberation for both films' heroines to take on their own agency and travel freely between gender roles and geographical locations. Their songs offer the utopian affects, as argued by Richard Dyer, for both heroines to claim space and time:

[Musical numbers are] a way of relating to the world that takes the claims of personal and community expression as an absolute right, a feeling to which a person has unquestionable, costless right, and which takes no heed

of which persons are allowed to expand and which not, nor whose space and time (including nature's) can readily be encroached upon. (Dyer 2012: 31)

It is during these musical moments when their songs redeem their death, both literally and metaphorically, and when the heroines transcend their immediate diegetic time and space to become symbols of freedom and salvation from their present enslaving circumstances, rooted in the transatlantic slave trade since the sixteenth century.

By foregrounding West Africa's traditional storytelling craft found in *griottes'* words and song in a modern narrative medium, cinema, the filmmakers raise women's voices to vocalise their historically muted positions and treatment. Effectively, Africa's traditional orature serves as a 'strategic communal tool for non-literate societies in their consolidation and socialisation processes that can be used to both praise and criticise those in authority because of the flexible nature of its performance and interpretation' (Mphande 2003: 580). What Victor Turner sees in the functions of social dramas illustrates the *griotte's* oral performance as a public practice for the society to return to normalcy or at least to recognise the splitting force in a given society after a crisis or trauma that it has previously experienced (Turner 1980: 149). Thus, the heroines' 'redemption songs' in both films serve to restore hope and reconcile the conflicts in the narrative and provide a utopian vision for an Africa that not only articulates but also controls her own voice, in the face of neo-colonialism and globalisation.

ACT II: *KARMEN GEÏ*

In 'Postcolonial Beaux' Stratagem: Singing and Dancing Back with Carmen' (2012), I highlight two cases in African cinema where the Carmen archetype is used to symbolise rebellion and counter-narrative against colonisation. One of them is *Karmen Geï*, the first African musical film of Senegal, that takes the story to the historic Gorée Island, indeed the appropriate setting for the film as a past centre of the Atlantic slave trade in the eighteenth century. The storyline loosely follows French writer Prosper Mérimée's novella, later dramatised in Georges Bizet's opera. It depicts the love story between a free-spirited Karmen (Djeïnaba Diop Gaï) and a police corporal Lamine (Magaye Niang), who, frustrated by his inability to contain and possess Karmen and fumed by his jealousy at her flirtation with other men, kills Karmen in the end. Using

Karmen as a reflexive trope, the director was able to ‘free’ his African Carmen in a number of ‘musical ways’. Firstly, he returns Mérimée’s Western gaze at a gypsy protagonist through Karmen’s relationship, initiated through a music-dance number, with another female character Angélique (Stephanie Biddle), whose character is associated with law and authority, white culture and Catholicism. Secondly, the original music rooted in the West-European classical operatic tradition is transformed into a local musical site of Senegal’s traditional *sabar* drumming, David Murray’s jazzy saxophone and Yandé Codou Sène’s haunting songs—‘Gaïnde Meïssa’ (sung to the ocean) and ‘Karmen Bukagnaman’, which is accompanied by a host of *sabar* drummers at a concert near the end of the film when Karmen meets her death. Lastly, the traditional storyteller *griot*’s role is fused into several characters’ oral performances, including Karmen’s, to invoke history, memory and contemporary social commentary. In particular, Karmen’s iterations of the ‘Habanera’ (‘Love Is a Rebellious Bird’) at various points of the narrative serve as the ‘crystallising moments’ according to Powrie, that reaffirm Karmen’s fatefully untamable nature. Complementing the impassioned ‘Habanera’ is a melancholic song reminiscing childhood innocence and happiness. These songs reveal personal nostalgic desires as well as progressive political messages for Africa’s future. During these moments, Karmen fulfils the ideals of the film’s vision of a liberated Africa moving forward and free from economic and cultural slavery in a post-independence context. Historically cast as a doomed tragic figure, Karmen must struggle to free herself from a male gaze-centred narrative begun by Mérimée, then by Bizet and eventually through Ramaka’s ‘remake’ in a hybridised medley of Third Cinema, song and music.

In a sense, this loose reworking of the original story in a new cultural and temporal framing intentionally challenges the notion and practice of adaptation and opens for new spaces to emerge. Herzog argues that the potentials of the Deleuzian cinematic refrain are in fact rarely realised in practice as refrains typically refer to a structural fixation of intervals for the lyrics and musical notes (Herzog 2009: 93). The cinematic refrain of such a well-known story in popular culture, with its own ‘gross constituent [narrative] units’, or *mythèmes* as Claude Lévi-Strauss terms them (1955: 432, 1958: 233, 1963: 207), is mingled and at times overlaps with musical numbers. In other words, these somewhat fixed narrative units based on Mérimée’s novella, sometimes presented in songs by Karmen at various story points, preserve the basic structural authenticity of the

Carmen archetype. Inspired by a musical event in post-Katrina New Orleans, Ramaka commented on Carmen as a subject matter for his film: 'I [...] welcomed the opportunity to revisit the character of Carmen and the social issues she evokes. The story of Carmen is intellectually rich and consistent. However, as many times as the story is told, you never get to the bottom of it' (Ramaka and Martin 2008: 34). The adaptation also allows the culturally and geographically diverse and yet specific applications of the refrains to operate as repetition with variations in the lyrics and the accompanying instruments in different narrative contexts. Consequently, the original Carmen narrative is reduced in this film to a minimal structure consistent with Mérimée's and Bizet's through the famed aria 'Habanera' and three recognisable, codified characters: Karmen and the two male love interests. Karmen's additional queer relationship with the jail warden Angélique redraws the narrative's territories that are time and place specific to twenty-first-century Senegal. Likewise, the local musicians' work and the *sabar*'s 'pulsing gyrations and rhythmic trickery/mastery' (Scott 2003/2004: 204), connect the re-territorialised narrative to its proper diegetic contemporary locale.

Freedom, as a theme and as a cinematic practice from traditional genre boundaries and the narrative arc, is established early in the film through Karmen's break from territorial constraints in gender as well as authority-community relations. The opening scene, a dance-musical, shows Karmen dancing to *sabar* and Murray's saxophone at the women's prison. The sound displays an odd discord yet fitting rhythm of the West African traditional instrument and contemporary jazz. Karmen moves erotically with the beats towards the camera and Angélique to seduce her, who succumbs to Karmen's allure. This same-sex attraction poses a major and essential turn from Mérimée's storyline, prefacing the women's chant later in prison, describing her as one who 'creates havocs':

You attract men and you make women undo their robes...
 Be careful!
 Hide your women, hide your men.
 Karmen has come!

Karmen's extreme mobility is reiterated by other women and sets up a recurring trope for her to sing/talk and dance/walk freely throughout the narrative. Karmen's voice further publicises what she can do as she rhetorically chants to the other women: 'Where does it go (tossing a piece of clothing around)?' 'Wherever you like!', they chant back. The

women's celebratory vocal exchange also bridges the public (jail, guarded and watched by other police women and the beach outside the prison walls, where smugglers often congregate and sail out) and the private (prison cell, where Karmen and other incarcerated women occupy and socialise), as these spaces are clearly defined and divided by the bars and gates in the *mise-en-scène*. The fluidity of their voices contrasts strongly with these physical barriers in a series of cross-cuts between the women singing in crowded imprisonment and Angélique sitting alone on the beach. Their song and chants, like Karmen, travel freely and reach other 'audiences'—Angélique, the prison guards and the seemingly empty beach, intermittently lit up by the lighthouse. These unchained voices foretell Karmen's escape and remain steadily audible to the audience outside the diegesis during cinematic projections. Karmen's power strikes her audiences, in and outside the film, as disruptive and destructive. This deepened notion of freedom in the soundscape engenders a counterpoint against the visual confinement, which Karmen alone can transgress, and further foregrounds the function of song as a form of resistance.

Karmen's defiance of authority, a fixated trope through her vocal performance and often sustained by her physical prowess, also turns the narrative into a postcolonial allegory as she acts as a self-reflexive *griotte*, criticising social injustice at the marriage celebration of the commissioner's daughter, Majiguène (Aïssatou Diop), and Lamine. The recurring *sabar* as sound bridge punctuates Karmen's oratory that recounts slave history and connects the cinematic space with the extradiegesis by invoking 'Kumba Kastel's spirit' in her lyrics. By altering the role of a wedding performer, who normally sings praises and entertains, Karmen instead exposes the corruption of her society, positing a 'point of disruption' in the narrative flow (Conrich and Tincknell 2006: 4). In this speech-dance, staged like a musical number but resembling the traditional *taasu*—Wolof poetic chanting often accompanied by *sabar*—Karmen's body and unexpected vocal jabs synchronise with the rhythmic 'sabarism' (Scott 2004: 203–207; Prabhu 2012: 69, 72, 76, 78, 85). As the women's chants in the prison prophesy earlier, Karmen again mesmerises the groom and challenges the bride in an exuberant duel dance. This 'refrain' in turn allows Karmen to claim both space and time as well as personal and community expression (Dyer 2012: 31). As she commands the screen space and soundscape during this musical moment, Ramaka indigenises the musical genre with *sabar* and the *griotte's* craft, while retaining the key structural functions of the genre's song and dance.

In framing Karmen as dissident and outlaw, Ramaka creates a dialectic between the visual and audio spaces for the refrain of dance/chant by staging these musical moments with Karmen in the foreground, surrounded by a diegetic audience, including different authority figures she attempts to subdue, typically filmed in deep-space composition with Karmen in focus. However, it is during her ‘Love Is a Rebellious Bird’ song, alone with Lamine, who is taking her to the police station, that the core message about her free spirit is crystallised. As in the previous prison scene, she commands full physical mobility, escapes at will and has complete control over the authorities. She occupies the centre of the territory wherever she goes and shifts the boundaries as she freely moves, re-territorialising the power struggle between her and each authority figure she faces. Her versatile mobility is contrasted with the stability of the ‘Habanera’ crystal-song moments in terms of their visual composition and ideological manifestation. A key Carmenesque musical refrain in the film, the ‘Habanera’ is adapted from Bizet’s well-known aria, translated word for word into Wolof, signalling Ramaka’s desire to ‘confront the language issue’ by reappropriating the heroine’s voice through a nostalgic connection with a native tongue of Africa’s precolonial culture (Ramaka and Martin 2008: 34). By recasting a West-European classic in transnational filmmaking, Ramaka pushes the genre’s boundaries partly through indigenous Wolof music, dance and poetry to localise the cultural identity of the production.

Unlike the ‘Habanera’ in Bizet’s opera, Karmen also sings this ‘crystal-song’ to other women in tender moments of nostalgia and reflection. After Angélique’s funeral, Majiguène asks Karmen to ‘give him back’, to which Karmen sings in response: ‘Love is a rebellious bird, and no one can tame it. If it doesn’t feel right to him, it’s really no use to call him’. During their previous encounter at the wedding duel, Karmen visibly dominates the screen. In this rare, relatively balanced and warm-coloured shot, however, the two women are both dressed in strikingly bright colours (Majiguène in royal blue and Karmen in her signature red) and share almost equal screen space. This dream-like visual quality suggests that the two female characters are engaged in a ‘reconciliatory effort’ despite the separation of the screen space by an unexplained stream of sand falling from above (Prabhu 2012: 72). While the rivalry between the women remains visible, the staging appears to be uncharacteristically tranquil and even peaceful. As one major function of the ‘crystal-song’ is to process emotions, this specific iteration of the ‘Habanera’ binds both

women in sisterhood in their shared desire for love and freedom and provokes a utopia-like affect in the viewer (Powrie 2017: 169, 237).

This poignant affect is intensified when Karmen, dressed in a black dress, sneaks into her mother's room during her sleep. She softly sings the 'crystal-song' refrain in her mother's ear. Ramaka staged this famous aria very differently from Bizet's. As analysed previously, Karmen sings it in the idealised scene with Majiguène, then to her mother. In Bizet's opera, it is sung in the first act after Carmen and other women exit the cigarette factory and enter a public square, where groups of soldiers are flirting with them. It is a seductive proclamation of Carmen in response to the men's question about when she will love them. Bizet's aria crystallises in public Carmen's identity as the object of desire in a male-centred narrative. However, Ramaka's Karmen reserves her desire to be free in private and gentle settings with women, while retaining the song's allegorical meaning for Karmen to symbolise Africa's postcolonial liberty. A gendered utopia emerges in these two moments, arranged as a musical refrain when the theme is crystallised for the heroine and for the audience. It is Karmen's self-affirmation, and she relates this awareness to the women that she loves and sympathises with. As a contrast to the transient and rebellious love that the lyrics of this 'crystal-song' denote, the imagery of a mother, in particular, provides emotional stability and foundation for one's life force at the personal level and connotes a natural bond with one's land, community and people (Ramaka and Martin 2008: 31).

In the end, what seems to be the foremost redeeming moment to Karmen comes when she and Samba, a father figure to her, reminisce about the past, a time when she was innocent, hopeful and happy. Dyer calls the formulaic, utopian nature of musical numbers 'discourses of happiness', according to Hollywood's musical conventions (Dyer 2012: 101). Although this nostalgic longing appears antithetical to the desire for a free and independent soul embodied in the 'crystal-song', as a political implication, what this nostalgia does for an African story is to ground the progressive utopian image in the nurturing indigenous culture that can help forge a new hybridised post-independence life, as Ramaka envisioned in an interview (Ramaka and Martin 2008: 32–34). The narrative is structured with 'problems or tensions to which the numbers offer solutions, or at any rate, respite: the numbers constitute definitions of happiness' (Dyer 2012: 101). In a tragic narrative where the musical form as a film genre does not seem like a natural fit, this song sequence certainly meets

the criteria Dyer theorises. In this sentimental musical moment, Karmen, dressed in an elegant dark long dress with white stripes and sitting in the foreground with her back to the camera, gently pleads with Samba: ‘Tell it to me again’. In the *mise-en-scène* soft-lit by candles and kerosene lamps, Samba lovingly recalls: ‘It was 15 years ago. A woman, a young woman, as beautiful as the moon!’ Karmen continues: ‘And to whom you have to give back the will to be happy...’. She asks him to sing ‘that song’, and as she begins to hum the tune, Samba and Karmen perform the duet, in Wolof:

Samba: The day begins. The child leaps off, and then goes off.

Child, where are you going?

Karmen: Mother, I’m going to see where the sun is. Because if it shines, we’ll all be happy. Child, tell me where it is. Tell me that all will be well today. Or once again our hopes will be disappointed. [The two embrace.]

The recollection of the past connects both characters back to a time when happiness hinged on a child’s innocent leaps and when hopes could be fulfilled by a simple faith in the sun to shine. The song serves as a temporal break from the diegetic present time, redeemed by the carefree optimism of a child in a song-dialogue with her mother, a relationship typically represented by the use of her native tongue Wolof.

Despite the circumstantial nature of such happiness, this song’s optimism depends on a constant, faithful condition like the love of her mother—‘if it [the sun] shines’—as one knows that the sun will always shine. This assurance irradiates a redeeming quality of the natural world that provides a nurturing and utopian condition necessary to obtain happiness. This song literally offers such a discourse of happiness, as Dyer argues, and a nostalgic ‘vision of life that has its source in Africa’ (Ramaka and Martin 2008: 25), as a sustaining force that inspired the filmmaker to pursue cinema as a means of storytelling. However, for Ramaka to stay true to the Carmenesque mythemes yet fitting to Wolof culture, Karmen’s death must be ritualised. And for Karmen’s character to be conceived as ‘monumental’ (Prabhu 2012: 75, 85), and ultimately subversive in a traditionally gendered narrative, she sings the ‘crystal-song’ while facing her own death in the flies above the stage during Yandé Codou Sène’s concert, to return the subjugating male gaze back at Lamine. Staged as a tense, cross-cut double song sequence and accompanied by *sabar* drummers, Sène sings ‘Karmen Bukagnaman’ praising the heroine as Karmen

sings the ‘Habanera’ at this critical ‘moment of illumination’ (Powrie 2017: 172), reminding Lamine that he cannot own her, and exercises her agency to choose death to truly be liberated and redeemed from any form of domination. Used as a sound bridge, Sène’s song becomes non-diegetic in the final scene, underscoring Karmen’s destiny and redemption as Samba buries her.

INTERLUDE: FROM DEATH TO RESURRECTION

Karmen’s musical moments serve two different yet closely related purposes. They operate both at the personal level for her and at the collective level as a national allegory outside the diegesis. Her ‘Habanera’ crystal-song transcends the conventional aesthetic affects of musical numbers. Ramaka imbedded in it also a utopian vision for Senegal and Africa going forward to reconcile with the effects of colonialism and globalisation, drawing strengths from indigenous languages and cultures (Ramaka and Martin 2008: 24–34), as shown in the choice of Wolof songs. As self-affirmation, the ‘Habanera’ sings of a posthumously liberated Carmen and an extradiegetic reality envisioned by the *griot*-filmmaker, who turns the musical moments into sites of political enunciation and imagination. Together with the nostalgic song, Ramaka composed a ‘counter-musical’ so to speak, a tragic yet ‘something better’ of a redeeming nature because Karmen escapes the mental slavery as a causal agent and remains free in and through her death.

Karmen’s song/dance sequences were live singing recorded on set, taking after African orature and resulting in a more organic integration into the narrative (Maasilta 2007: 168, 170, 239). On the other hand, *Nha Fala* is structurally simpler with musical moments largely following Hollywood’s musical genre conventions by relying on non-continuity editing and postproduction dubbing with a non-diegetic score to create a fantasy look and to accommodate the frequent and longer, choreographed song sequences. While Karmen’s redemption is manifested in her longing for childhood innocence and self-will but eventually through death during the musical moments, the hopeful return of *Nha Fala*’s heroine from France conversely brings about the resurrection of her life force through song and dance. Thematically, the musical moments throughout both films exhibit various integral temporal mythemes (such as love, liberty, longing, fear, courage), where such emotional expressions are amplified. They all display similar centrifugal effects, bringing together ‘moments

of time [...] to create the intense light of affect' through music and song (Powrie 2017: 239). The two films also emerged as a transition in African films from Sembènian Third Cinema's response to Western narrative cinema's aesthetics since the 1960s to adapting the musical genre as a restructured resistance to Hollywood's cultural neo-colonialism. Karmen reflects Ramaka's anticolonial position by experimenting with the musical genre, while Gomes runs with the genre's formula and turns it into an idealistic carnival of resurrection that unites all the ethnic groups of the nation (Nafafé 2013: 46), as something 'that can be imagined and maybe realised' (Dyer 1985: 222).

ACT III: *NHA FALA* (*MY VOICE*)

Flora Gomes' first musical comedy-satire is set in an African town where a girl, Vita (Fatou N'Diaye), sings the theme of life and rejuvenation through her long-buried voice. Vita's initial silence stems from a family curse: she will die if she sings. However, the heroine's symbolic transgression brings life, instead of death, as her rebellious singing becomes a redeeming act of resurrection to circumvent colonialism that has muted Africa's past. Co-produced by France, Portugal and Luxembourg and aptly titled to mean '*My Voice*', *Nha Fala* presents the life force that its own tradition underestimated, to surpass the suppression and resurface, free from its bondage. A dedication 'in memory of Amílcar Cabral, father of the independence of Guinea-Bissau and of the Cape Verde Islands, assassinated in 1973', opens the film and signals that Vita's redemption songs would serve as a parable for the black man's soul to return to its proper free place. Gomes spoke of the aim of the film:

This is my take on the future for a new generation [...] Whenever Africa is spoken about or depicted, it is always in terms of the aid we receive, war, people dying of starvation, sick people [...] I wanted people to see our Africa, the Africa of my dreams, the Africa that I love [...] It is a happy Africa, where people dance, where people can speak freely. That is why I made this film. (AFAI 2010)

Made after a civil war in Guinea-Bissau that devastated the country, the film renders particularly a restorative vision and 'discourse of happiness' for his heroine to represent his home and even the continent as feminine,

resourceful, talented and happy. Treating these themes in such a carnivalesque yet ambivalent narrative with potentially chaotic mise-en-scène in crowd scenes, Gomes benefited from the musical format's relatively stable conventions and purposes to be a 'maximum disregard of space-time coordinates, with little or no attempt to construct, let alone reproduce, a coherent space-time continuum' (Dyer 2012: 16). The musical genre as entertainment fulfils this desire to offer an image of 'something we want deeply that our day-to-day lives don't provide. Alternatives, hopes, wishes—these are the stuff of utopia, the sense that things could be better [...]' (Dyer 1985: 222). Like the setting of *Karmen Gei*, Guinea-Bissau, a small nation nestled between Senegal and Guinea in West Africa, also has its roots in the Mali Empire and is known as the Slave Coast that cajoles bitter memories of the trans-Atlantic slave trade—a past that Gomes hoped to use his film to overcome through song and dance.

The film opens with a subdued female voice humming a foreshadowing and recurring tune that accompanies the funeral procession for a dead parrot, carried on a stretcher by a group of school children. This image of death leads the audience into the open streets, where other death motifs occur, and serves as a structuring trope for the narrative: first, the death of the school pet parrot, followed by the neighbour Mr. Sonho's death and lastly the mock funeral staged by the protagonist. All these moments of death encounters are positioned to prepare for the resurrection of Vita's and her mother's buried voices. The opening funeral procession is followed by the film's first musical number set in a Catholic church, where choir members compete to vote for a new director. This is the first instance where we witness the 'silence/death' of Vita's voice. All members in the choir take turns singing why the others should vote for them. Vita is asked to judge the competition without opening her mouth to sing like the others. The refrain in this number is notoriously repetitive: 'You should vote for me because [...]'. However, it shows a democratic process where all persons exercise their own voices to convince the others through song, a seemingly unlikely means for political persuasion. Nonetheless, this opening number sets the stage for a post-independence African state to realise the ideals of decolonising the past by giving voice to all qualified individuals from all professions and ethnicities. This refrain repositions Vita's community in a prescribed, commonly understood democratic framework choreographed as a 'social drama', a public performance's function theorised by Turner, to resolve the impasse of not having a choir director.

This hopeful vision of democracy is followed by the second musical number. It reminds the audience of France's continual cultural imperialism, which is paradoxically also a force of change and transformation. The song erupts as Vita bids farewell to a group of school children and her friends, who sing to advise her for her journey to France: 'The most important thing is to find a husband [in Paris]. If you marry there, you'll never be hungry again'. In exchange for their advice, Vita replies in defiance: 'I'll give you mine: build coffins. The only sure thing in this country is death'. This is the harshest political statement by the heroine thus far, although she avoids singing due to the family taboo. Yet she judges and comments like a *griotte* during the musical numbers. These pre-Paris 'tease numbers' contrast sharply with the heroine's later 'crystal-song'. Other characters look up to her, even acknowledging her silence: 'No one ever heard you sing. It's a mystery to me', to which Vita quietly utters '*nha fala*'. After participating in a couple of numbers without singing, Vita sees death again. Seen from a straight high angle down, Mr. Sonho's body lies in a marlin-shaped coffin, a constant reminder of her family taboo of singing. Before Vita leaves for France, her mother asks her to swear never to sing, and again she responds simply with '*nha fala*', followed by Sonho's funeral procession in the street as Vita departs for Paris. The loosely sequenced images of death, songs and her departure, however, invoke strong emotions about her 'dead' voice, a necessary plot anchor for the redemption to take place later.

Vita's transformation begins two-thirds through the film, after her boyfriend Pierre (Jean-Christophe Dollé) encourages her to sing the song he has written. Her 'crystal-song' performance reminds us of Agnès Varda's Cléo as she outpours herself and releases her suppressed voice during a spontaneous studio rehearsal in a highly melodramatic fashion. She picks up the music sheet, asking to 'keep only the commas and periods' and changing the rest of the lyrics. As non-diegetic music rises, she begins to sing in the style of a French pop song. Using double exposure of medium close-ups to frame her singing in the centre and place Pierre and the sound technician across the soundboard appearing on each side of her in the same frame and listening in awe, Gomes lets the music take over. In a montage sequence, 'the music takes flight', taking the viewer with the characters from the studio suddenly filled with the band members accompanying her singing, to the famous stairs of Montmartre, to the group celebrating at a restaurant, to the couple's bedroom, and finally back to the studio with Vita and Pierre holding a CD of the song recording and its

jacket. This ‘crystal-song’ is heard in its entirety, yet shifting from diegetic to non-diegetic as we ‘fly with it’ around the colonial metropolis Paris, drenched in the song’s ‘soaring emotion’ (Powrie 2017: 3). This is her own song, titled ‘La Peur’ (‘Fear’), which reflexively expresses her own journey of hiding her voice for fear of death. The lyrics are divided into two halves, like the film’s plot: the first half depicts how fear devours and controls her world and voice, while the change (physically away from home) gives her the power to ‘break stones and cross rivers’ when fear flees. This utopian emancipation leads to the redemption song ‘Dare!’ for her to completely break free from the curse by staging her own death, a public drama in Turner’s sense, and to resolve the paradox of death and resurrection in a crucial musical moment at the end of the film.

‘To save her [Vita’s mother] and me, I have to die. And to die well, I have to organise my funeral’. Vita’s ingenious scheme, to be carried out in the final long yet colourfully choreographed number ‘Dare!’, reflects her agency to choose and act. Staging ‘something [that...] can be imagined and maybe realised’ (Dyer 1985: 222) is what Gomes does reflexively in this film because for the heroine/nation ‘to be reborn’, as Vita reasons, ‘you have to accept to die’. This last death encounter would require her to lie in a pink coffin in the shape of a butterfly and be carried out into the street in a funerary procession. Gomes uses West African polyrhythmic drumming to commence the finale, connecting the diegesis back to the indigenous cultural roots. When the French musicians arrive, the whole town participates in this public drama, bidding her corpse (posed by one of Vita’s friends) farewell and bursting into Guinea-Bissau’s festive *gumbe* song and dance. Vita encourages her mother: ‘You need to die with me to be reborn. Sing, mom, sing!’, referencing the old superstition and fulfilling Gomes’s political advocacy to liberate female voices:

Vita: What you just do
 When someone blocks your path?
 Chorus (crowd): Dare!
 Vita: What must you do to move ahead?
 Chorus: Dare!

With the politically charged, catchy refrain ‘Dare!’ repeated, Cabral’s bust is carried to the foreground surrounded by colourful coffins in the shape of animals and sea creatures while the camera cuts back and forth between Vita, her mother and the crowd. Once Vita’s mother also begins to sing,

a jump cut breaks the spatial continuity to show Vita gleefully lying quite alive in the coffin and rising to sway her body joyfully, juxtaposing death and rebirth in the musical moment. The chorus's refrain continues, extending the diegetic space to Cabral's bust magically ascending by itself onto a pedestal, rightfully positioned to overlook the harbour as the gateway of the nation and thus concluding Vita's redemption song as well as the diegesis. Combining the resources at home and from abroad, this musical moment resolves the conflict between suppression and the agency to act through the dialectic death motifs in the *mise-en-scène* and the soundscape's jubilant resurrection.

FINALE

Both Karmen's and Vita's goal is not only physical but also mental freedom, as Marley's lyrics emphasise. Mental slavery is the ultimate doom in the African people's continual struggles against colonisation. Herzog's analysis of the Deleuzian 'dissonant refrain' addresses the body movement (character's mobility) and metered rhythms as implication of racial politics (Herzog 2009: 93). Both of these aspects are foregrounded in Karmen's and Vita's character traits and integrated in their themed musical numbers. Their redemption is attained through thematically overcoming death, either by facing it with self-will or by conquering it only to live again. Both scenarios begin with their bodily mobility in song and dance to transgress boundaries, resulting in deterritorialising the pre-existing sociopolitical taboos and shifting the power dynamics by being rebellious 'trashy women' (Harrow 2013: 111), challenging authority or tradition. These key themes are all intensified during the accentually choreographed musical moments cinematically. Whether it is for Ramaka's post-Katrina New Orleans or modern-day Senegal (Ramaka and Martin 2008: 34), or to reflect Gomes's non-essentialist, ambivalent view towards the post-independence identity of Guinea-Bissau (Ferreira 2016: 234), the heroines' bodily freedom allows them to fearlessly sing of their ideological stand and project a hopeful vision to be emancipated from past centuries of enslaving practices and narratives in world politics today.

Their redemption songs provide utopian moments to temporarily suspend the diegetic time and space, to engage the characters liberally in circumstances which would bring them and the audience to a flight of 'soaring emotion or searing insight' (Powrie 2017: 3), consistent with the genre's convention that combines different forms of expression:

J'ai voulu porter le regard sur celle de ces notions qui paraît la plus futile: la voix, le chant, cette parole mélangée à la musique, à la fois forme et message, qui a toujours été pour moi un des signes de la liberté. [I wanted to explore one of these notions that seems most futile: the voice, the song, this lyric mixed with the music, form and message at once, which for me has always been one of the signs of freedom.] (Gomes 2002)

Both Ramaka and Gomes used the musical genre to interrogate the formal boundaries set by fiction cinemas, which are often used for 'serious' subject matters, and reflexively imbedded in their films the very questions about freedom of creativity and black politics in cinemas by African directors. The mixed styles of song and dance in both films display such freedom for the filmmakers to traverse between regional musical traditions and practices and engage indigenous influences and global music trends. The intertextual nature of the *Carmen* adaptation and the ever presence of Cabral in *Nha Fala* also grant artistic license for indigenisation, while at the same time providing the necessary structural refrains for the narrative arcs to integrate with the songs' idealistic workings albeit in their own local settings, culminating in musical moments that solidify the intellectual concepts for the African audience to 'dare!' and 'to grasp the reality and act' (Ramaka and Martin 2008: 24). These are their redemption songs and songs of freedom.

NOTES

1. Earlier accounts were also found in a book by the Arab author Al-Bakri as early as 1068 (Hale 1998: 8, 73).
2. See Hale's first chapter for an array of the roles griots and griottes have played historically (Hale 1998: 18–58).
3. See also Sidikou and Hale (2012).

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‘No Hay Nada Que Celebrar’: Music,
Migration, and Violence
in Luis Estrada’s *El Infierno* (2010)

Jacqueline Avila

TEXT

In his work *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, author and cultural critic Octavio Paz provides a thoughtful examination regarding the Mexican fascination with death. He states: ‘The word death is not pronounced in New York, in Paris, in London because it burns the lips. The Mexican, in contrast, is familiar with death, jokes about it, caresses it, sleeps with it, celebrates it; it is one of his favorite toys and his most steadfast love’ (Paz 1985: 57). Paz discusses the celebrations of death in Mexico, describing the colourful and vibrant representations constructed during *Día de muertos* (Day of the Dead) and the indifference that many Mexicans supposedly feels towards it, either as an event or as a condition. According to Paz, ‘the Mexican death is a mirror of Mexican life. And the Mexican shuts himself away

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and ignores both of them' (58). But death takes on a myriad of meanings in Mexico. Aside from these yearly, lively celebrations that have captured the imagination of the world, the visual depiction of death and its realities have been splashed onto the cover pages of Mexico's popular periodicals for several decades, portraying the violent and gruesome activities enacted by the country's numerous drug cartels. These narratives and images have also bled into the film industry, offering the population a ghastly and at times intimate look into the culture. Death and its associated violence are at the heart of Luis Estrada's 2010 film *El Infierno* (*Hell*), which focuses on the protagonist Benny García and his descent into the narcoculture that has absorbed the country and left it in a state of severe political, social, and economic crisis.

Premiering during Mexico's Centennial of the Revolution and Bicentennial of the Independence, both taking place in 2010,¹ and backed by Mexico's major cultural institutions, including IMCINE (Institute of Mexican Cinematography), CONACULTA (National Council for Culture and Arts), and FONCA (National Foundation for Culture and the Arts), *El Infierno* received both accolades from audiences and the popular press, as well as backlash from government officials for its negative and unfavourable depiction of contemporary Mexican politics and culture. Set in Northern Mexico and functioning as a response to then President Felipe Calderón's '*Lucha contra el narcotráfico*' ('Fight Against Narcotraffickers') initiative (2006–2012),² Estrada's film offers a dismal interpretation of the country, highlighting the extremities of Mexican rural poverty and the exploitation of its residents by Mexico's quadrangle of higher powers: the police, the government, the church, and the cartels.

But while also a critical commentary, *El Infierno* relies heavily on dark or macabre humour, a satirical representation of the displacement and the violence that the country was—and currently is—experiencing, where music plays a strategic and vital role. Dark humour and music tend to go hand in hand in Estrada's films, as music typically portrays the development (or downfall) of the protagonist. *El Infierno* marked the end of Estrada's political trilogy, films that openly criticised contemporary Mexican politics and the national political parties, particularly the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI or Institutional Revolutionary Party). The initial organisation of the trilogy included *La ley de Herodes* (*Herod's Law*, 1999) and *Un mundo maravilloso* (*A Wonderful World*, 2006).³ A later cinematic instalment in 2014, entitled *La dictadura perfecta* (*The*

Perfect Dictatorship), broke up the trilogy to scrutinise the *sexenio*, or six-year administration, of then President Enrique Peña Nieto (2012–2018). In all these films, Estrada uses humour to successfully sell his criticism about and condemnation for the Mexican government, and each film also uses specific music, functioning both diegetically and non-diegetically, to convey the director's scathing commentary in intriguing and intricate ways.⁴ *El Infierno*, however, is Estrada's most heavily musical film, featuring a wide variety of music selections that correspond with the characterisation and the activities of *narcotraficantes* (drug traffickers) and the atmosphere of violence, acting satirically and often ironically. With this film, the victims of the sweeping narco-related violence and their deaths become caricatures against a horrific and brutal backdrop, concluding with tragic and unfortunate consequences for Benny and, by extension, for Mexico. Film scholar Jorge Ayala Blanco indicates that the justice that was intended to materialise from *El Infierno* is masked by the inclusion and representation of the absurd, or what he terms '*macroabsurdo*'. He asserts: 'In more than one way, the situation is desperate, but not serious. [The film] is a parable continuing a ridiculous debasement that has been perceived as the only form for current Mexican survival' (Ayala Blanco 2011: 434). In other words, humour obscures the severity of the situation. The consequences of displacement and violence become comical and almost artificial, and the film's strategic uses of music, or musical moments, play essential and colluding roles in this process, offering audiences a caustic take on devastating circumstances.

MUSICAL MOMENTS, MEXICAN CINEMA'S NARCOSCAPE, AND *EL INFIERNO*

Since the 1930s and the beginnings of early recorded, synchronised sound cinema, music has played a crucial and fundamental role in Mexican film productions. Several of the industry's established national film genres, such as the prostitute melodrama, the *comedia ranchera* (ranch comedy), and the *cine de añoranza porfiriana* (films of Porfirian longing), have included crucial diegetic musical sequences or performances that provide the audience with important messages regarding the location, the action, the emotive atmosphere, and/or the character development.⁵ In her work on the function of music and dance in Mexican cinema, film scholar Ana M. López argues that the melodramatic narratives of Mexican

cinema, particularly during the Golden Era (roughly 1936–1952), were predominantly dictated and driven by diegetic song. She states:

In these and other films the narrative stoppage usually generated by performances was reinvested with emotion, so that melodramatic pathos emerged in the moment of performance itself (through gesture, sentiment, interactions with the audience within the film or simply musical choice) [...] Music and song rather than dramatic action propel the narrative. (López 1993: 145)

These specific moments in the film foreground the music and drive the plot to behave in what Amy Herzog has labelled ‘the musical moment’: the moment ‘when music, typically a popular song, inverts the image–sound hierarchy to occupy a dominant position in a filmic work. The movements of the image, and hence the structuring of space and time, are dictated by song’ (Herzog 2010: 7). In Mexican cinema, songs that were played in their entirety generally functioned as one of the primary signifiers for the formation of the character’s sense of self, and these musical moments offered the audience, both on and off screen, insight into the construction of their identities.⁶

Mexico’s long-standing tradition of incorporating music in compelling and calculated ways has helped increase production values, tying in many of the nation’s most popular performers to the film industry and enticing audiences to flock to theatres to see and hear their favourite artists.⁷ The prominent role of music in Mexican film productions has continued well into the twenty-first century, although the musical moments do not necessarily involve on-screen performances (although they often do); musical moments in contemporary Mexican cinema tend to feature popular songs functioning on a non-diegetic level, in which the performed lyrics and sound take over and shape the narrative. Films that focus on the activities and the culture of Mexico’s drug cartels are no exception in this regard.

Music is an essential feature of ‘narcoculture’, which Miguel Cabañas refers to as the various representations about drug traffickers and the world of growing, processing, distributing, and consuming illegal drugs. He adds: ‘It also includes the effects of these activities on individuals and communities, the formation of protective networks and money laundering, their association with power structures, and their contribution to political corruption’ (2014: 6). Mass media has become a provocative conduit for the construction and representation of narcoculture in

what has been termed the 'narcoscape', the landscape in which representations of drug trafficking become more consumable in and for popular culture. Narcoscapes shaped by the popular cultural forms of literature, music, television, and films are relatively fictional, consisting of several complex and at times contradictory components that provide audiences with varying representations of the political-economic power relations at work.⁸

In cinema, drug trafficking has been a significant part of Mexican film culture since the 1970s, appearing predominantly as low-budget, direct-to-video cinema produced by Mexican and Mexican American studios (Rashotte 2015: 1–2). These films, labelled simply as 'narcocinema', specialised in elevating the *narcotraficante* to a privileged status, featuring the popular vernacular from the border, graphic violence and nudity, heavily emphasised melodramatic plot lines, and music, often functioning as interludes, that in a sense exploit the actions of the narcos. This particular selection of music focuses on specific genres and performers that are connected to the actual narcoculture, serving as an indexical sign for the national audience. *El Infierno*, however, is not strictly considered narcocinema; it falls under a current that Ryan Rashotte labels *nuevo cine de narcos* (new narco cinema), a more stylised, polished, and heavily financed film that borrows from the current of narcocinema, but constructs the narcoscape differently, both visually and aurally.⁹ Rashotte explains that *El Infierno* both criticises and spoofs narcocinema, making use of many of its standard elements listed above, including the use of music that is socially and culturally linked to (or relates to) narcos and narcoculture (2015: 159).

El Infierno is a film about displacement and violence in the narco-sphere. Twenty years after immigrating to the United States, Benjamín 'El Benny' García (Damián Alcázar) is deported back to Mexico, returning to his hometown of San Miguel Arcángel to find it governed by a drug cartel family known as Los Reyes del Norte, headed by its notorious and apathetic drug lord, Don José Reyes (Ernesto Gómez Cruz). The infiltration and the takeover of San Miguel Arcángel by the cartel significantly, and humorously, changed the town's name to San Miguel Narcángel for the residents. Benny returns with good intentions and high expectations: his dream is to build a school for English instruction for the town's children. This dream, however, is short lived when Benny takes on the financial burdens of his family after finding out his brother, Pedro 'El Diablo' or 'Devil' García (Tenoch Huerta), was killed, leaving behind his

teenaged son (Kristian Ferrer) and his wife Guadalupe Solís (Elizabeth Cervantes). Benny, in desperate need of money to help his struggling nephew, is quickly absorbed into the cartel's business by his best friend Eufemio 'El Cochiloco' Mata (Joaquín Cosío, whose performance steals the show) and gradually becomes one of the cartel's leading *sicarios* (assassins). For this, he is paid both handsomely and tragically. Although he successfully acclimates into the narcoculture of his town, Benny realises that the corruption runs deep: the Reyes cartel has power over everyone and exercises their control in horrific and deadly ways. After attempting to make a deal with authorities (who turned out to be working for the cartel) and discovering the decapitated head of his girlfriend, Benny sacrifices his life by killing the cartel leaders at the town's Centennial and Bicentennial celebration in hopes that the violence would end and the narcoculture would disappear. After Benny's death, however, his young nephew takes up the reins and begins a new current of cartel power.

As previously mentioned, *El Infierno* is not considered wholly narcocinema, but tangentially references many of the genre's signifiers, including the selection, placement, and role of music. The song list in narcocinema proper includes *narcocorridos*—typically strophic songs in a major key that narrate stories of drug trafficking, some successful, some tragic, and the drug lords—and, depending on the location of the narrative, either heavily brass-infused banda music or polka-driven *música norteña*, or both.¹⁰ Because the film is set in the northern region of Mexico, the soundscape—the general acoustical environment of a society—features musics predominantly heard and performed around the Texas-Mexico border.¹¹ The Mexico City-based periodical *Reforma* has noted that *El Infierno* can be interpreted as a musical tribute or homage to Tex-Mex *conjuntos* (small musical ensembles that feature the button accordion) and *narcocorridos*, emphasising its connections with the border, Northern Mexican culture, and narcocinema (Cabrera 2010: 9). The film features an extensive compiled list of songs from artists and groups that perform *música norteña*, *corridos* (strophic narrative ballads), and the *canción ranchera*. These include El Flaco Jiménez, Los Alegres de Terán, José Alfredo Jiménez, Los Tucanes de Tijuana, and Los Lobos, among others. Much of the film's music reinforces the narcoscape's 'assumed sound' or 'assumed atmosphere' in relation to the developing narrative, functioning in the background and taking a subservient role to the action on-screen. Music is so present in the film, however, that Ayala Blanco declares that its interjections are 'irritatingly frequent' and distract

from the film's 'visual lyricism' (Ayala Blanco 2011: 430). But there are two essential musical moments where music dictates Benny's dual identities in the film: first as an undocumented immigrant forced to return to Mexico, articulated by Los Lobos' version of 'México-Americano', and second, as one of the Reyes cartel's *sicarios*, characterised by Chalino Sánchez's *narcocorrido* 'El Crimén de Culiacán' ('The Crime of Culiacán'). A closer reading of these two musical moments reveals functions more compelling than just providing an 'assumed aural atmosphere' or as 'interjecting' in the narrative. Both scenes are montages edited to fit the entirety of the songs and both are crucial for Benny's development: these musical selections affirm his transformation from a recently deported working man to *sicario*, and exalt the pessimism and death that follows him in unapologetic yet satirical ways.

'DON'T COME BACK': 'MÉXICO-AMERICANO' AND BENNY'S DEPORTATION

At the beginning of the film, a cowboy-hat-wearing Benny García sets off to the United States in the early 1990s. He, like so many before and after him, is full of optimism, promising his mother and brother he will send money to alleviate their financial burdens. After a brief fade out, the next scene takes place twenty years later in 2010. Benny, now sporting a baseball cap, handcuffed, and looking dejected, crosses the El Paso-Ciudad Juárez border after a white male border agent wearing aviator sunglasses tells him: 'Grab your bags, keep on walking. Welcome back to Mexico. Don't come back'. Benny then boards a bus that heads to his hometown. As the bus drives away from the port of entry, the hybrid *norteña*-rock version of 'México-Americano' performed here in Spanish by the rock band Los Lobos begins to play. 'México-Americano' was initially written as a *corrido* in Spanish by Rumel Fuentes (1943–1986), a schoolteacher and songwriter from El Paso, Texas, whose music contributed to the soundscape of the Chicano movement during the early 1970s.¹² Fuentes's music, which consisted of originally composed *corridos* and works for *conjunto*, provided a positive conduit and tool for the unification of Mexican Americans struggling to find their place and their identity on U.S. soil. 'México-Americano' was considered one of the anthems of the movement, detailing the dual identities felt or undertaken by the singer, who proudly declares that he is both from the United States and Mexico, but his origins are from the 'noble race... *la raza de oro*' (the

golden race), which functions as the song's refrain: 'I am from the golden race / I am Mexican American'.¹³

The arrangement performed in the film by Los Lobos accentuates the hybrid and transnational nature of the music and the identity and cultural politics of the border region. Los Lobos, hailed from East Los Angeles, are known for their genre and stylistic synthesis that includes rock, R&B, Tex-Mex, country, blues, Mexican *son*, *cumbia*, and *música nortehña*, just to name a few.¹⁴ In 'México-Americano', the song's lyrics suggest a straddling of two cultures on the border, and the musical arrangement reveals a fusion of musical elements. Featuring a bouncy rhythm in 2/4 that is reminiscent of a fast polka (typical in *música nortehña*), this arrangement emphasises a diversity of sound that bridges *nortehña* and rock. An electronic guitar plays the off beats while the melodic line is given to the accordion and tenor saxophone, which is not part of the standard instrumentation in *música nortehña*. The portrayal of this border soundscape emphasises the collision of cultures in effect creating an updated *nortehña* sound for the twenty-first century. The song is strophic, featuring verses sung in thirds that elevate the proud dual identity conveyed in the lyrics. The association of this song with Benny at this early introductory moment suggests that during those twenty years, Benny adapted to his life in the United States, although the audience does not know what that consisted of or what he did. He embodied these national and cultural identities successfully until he was deported. As Benny travels through the countryside by bus, we are given a visual moving display of life in Mexico along *Ruta 2010* (Route 2010), the Mexican highway signs marking the celebrations erected for the Centennial and Bicentennial Celebrations.

The rhythm and flow of the song structures the visual montage that encapsulates his 24-hour bus ride, which we experience through both Benny's point of view from his window seat and through medium and long shots around the bus. As Los Lobos belt out the beginning lines of the song's first verse, 'From my mother I am Mexican / By destiny I am American', we see through a cinematographic yellow filter an arid and bleak desert, abandoned houses and car lots, and a chapel to *La Santísima Muerte* (also referred to as '*la niña blanca*' or 'the white girl'), a demanding patroness that upholds Death as the ultimate sovereign, particularly for narcos (Lomnitz 2003: 493). We witness the decay, the dismantling, and the death of the countryside through quick, successive shots while Los Lobos continue to sing lyrics of pride and honour, amplified by the bright accordion and saxophone riffs call and response to the

vocals, which cut through the dry and depressed landscape. The music's quick and lively tempo and the boastful, repetitive lyrics about transnational migration severely contrast to the on-screen movement: 'Two countries are my land / I defend them with honour'. The song actively works to shape a satirical sense of energetic levity and comradeship through the linking of states and cities in both countries that is disassociated with the dire imagery and vast countryside outside the bus window.

The most damning parts (or perhaps the funniest) occur between Benny and his fellow countrymen: Benny is robbed twice, first at night by an armed man with a mullet and a moustache on the decrepit bus, corresponding comically in the song to the signature male *grito* (yell or cry) heard typically in mariachi performances, then by the armed military in the daytime, who take him off the bus and strip him down, 'discovering' his wad of U.S. American dollars hidden in the lining of his loosely-fitted white underwear. In each instance, Benny, newly arrived on Mexican soil, looks on, confused and helpless as he is being robbed and fearing for his life at gunpoint by both petty criminals and government-run entities. The song's lyrics disregard or overlook these events, focusing more on the uniqueness and the multicultural attributes of two national identities.

Despite 'México-Americano's' optimistic declaration and commentary, Benny experiences a rather severe and negative initiation to starting his new life in present-day Mexico, which contrasts with the music's original message. As the song repeats the refrain 'I am Mexican American' and reaches its final cadence, a dishevelled and hungry Benny departs from the bus with what is left of his belongings and walks towards his childhood home, situated in the desert.

The placement and selection of the music indicates that Benny is considered (both by the film and by himself) as part of both countries: he trades the cowboy hat for the baseball cap and throughout the film, continues to sprinkle in English words and phrases, à la 1950s Mexican *pachuco* comedian Germán Valdés 'Tin Tan'.¹⁵ Benny, as a repatriated migrant, becomes a symbol of the immigration experience on the United States-Mexico border and a representative of the Mexican American struggle. Despite the idealism conveyed in the music through the representation of dual identities, dancing rhythms, and colourful instrumentation, the movement across and around the border and Benny's encounters with thieves indicates more of a dangerous and pessimistic reality. The music functions as a sarcastic and ironic rebuke of Benny's immigrant experience and deportation rather than a rhapsodic narration

of praise and privilege. According to anthropologist Claudio Lomnitz, the border is charged with life and death symbolism: ‘Border crossings are represented both as baptisms and as dangerous passages that require divine intercession and protection’ (Lomnitz 2003: 476). Benny’s movement across borders signifies this baptism and death as he involuntarily reterritorialises back into what he considered his home country. This musical moment of ‘México-Americano’ introduces Benny as the protagonist who boasts dual identities despite his forced removal from the United States and an end to his own American dream. The parting words ‘don’t come back’ emphasise the stark and precarious realities of many forced to return during a socio-economic crisis. Immigration, transnationalism, and homecoming are sarcastically met with dejection and disdain.

‘EL CRIMEN DE CULIACÁN’ AND BENNY, CARTEL ASSASSIN

It does not take long for Benny to get sucked into the employment of Don José Reyes, the head of the Reyes cartel. He is recruited by Don José’s leading strong arm, El Cochiloco, who exemplifies a Northern Mexican cowboy stereotype affiliated with the cartels (cowboy hat, leather jackets with elaborate embroidery, boots, brightly coloured silk button-up shirt, and dyed black hair, as an extra touch). Initially not a violent person and reluctant to cause any harm, Benny eventually embraces the work with the cartel, changing his appearance to fit the model of a Northern Mexican narco. He also picks up on the narco activities: he begins killing and disposing of bodies with El Cochiloco without much remorse and with some humour. His transition is captured in another important identity-building musical moment featuring ‘El Crimen de Culiacán’, a *narcocorrido* written by Nacho Hernández and performed by Chalino Sánchez that details the brutal murder of two individuals at the hands of a cartel in Culiacán, Sinaloa.¹⁶

The use of Sánchez’s performance here, especially ‘El Crimen de Culiacán’, is quite telling, as it is a historically significant *narcocorrido*. Sánchez was a famous songwriter and performer who had immigrated to the United States in the 1970s. His popularity grew in southern California and eventually in Mexico; he became the dominant source in the creation and performance of *narcocorridos*. Tragically, in 1992, Sánchez was murdered in Sinaloa, and soon after his *narcocorridos*, both the lyrics

and the sound, became rallying cries for *narcotraficantes*, their followers, and the general public. Although his music was not exclusively used in narcocinema, his songs became sonic staples in the narcoscape, censored from the radio, which only amplified his popularity. One of his early hits, 'El Crimen de Culiacán' follows the formula of a *narcocorrido* from the north: it is strophic, in triple metre, and accordion-driven, featuring lyrics that narrate the activities of a cartel. The use of 'El Crimen de Culiacán' in this montage, which, unlike 'México-Americano' encompasses several days rather than just 24 hours, solidifies, or provides credibility to Benny's transition from a deported immigrant to *sicario*, while also harkening back to an older generation of narcoculture voiced by Sánchez, one that the Mexican audience would recognise.

In the film, Benny begins to enjoy his new wealth and power, elevated, in a sense, to the heroes of the *narcocorridos* of the past, emphasised with his snorting of cocaine on the chest of a sex worker, the ridiculous baptism of his gun by the town's priest, and his purchase of golden boot tips that are held in a wooden box adorned with the image of La Virgen de Guadalupe, Mexico's Patron Saint. Initially, the sound of the *narcocorrido*, heavily enforced by the accordion call and response with the strains of Sánchez's voice verify Benny's role in the cartel and his gradual ascent up the hierarchy. But much like 'México-Americano', the placement of 'El Crimen de Culiacán' has a sarcastic rather than boastful function; the song intentionally does not glorify narcos, but, rather, warns against them, describing the gruesome double murder of two men from Sinaloa, Francisco López and Francisco Beltrán, at the hands of the local cartel. The *narcocorrido* begins with the following introductory verse: 'I will sing you a *corrido* about men that were killed / Without receiving compassion, they were cruelly tortured'. In the song, Sánchez details how both men were walking around the Palmito neighbourhood, unaware that they were about to be killed. López had killed a man who 'stole his beloved' (perhaps a member of the cartel), but Beltrán was an innocent bystander. Although the manner in which they were killed is not specifically stated, the lyrics indicate that the two men were tortured and in their death, 'their mothers were left in mourning'. In typical fashion for a *corrido*, Sánchez ends with a final stanza that serves as a moral to the tragic story, urging listeners not to forget what happened to these men.

In the film, the *narcocorrido* flows in counterpoint to Benny's situation and his actions, working to expose Benny's broken moral compass as he becomes more comfortable with his role as murderer and cartel thug.

During the montage, Estrada taps into several practices of narcoculture and the aural and visual construction of the *narcotraficante*, including intimidation, misogyny, drug use, overt displays of religious symbolism, brutal violence, and arms smuggling. Sánchez's sung verses that detail the gruesome murders and disembowelling of López and Beltrán correspond with the more violent images (the killing and disposing of bodies) while the responding accordion riffs highlight Benny's other activities, including collecting money with El Cochiloco and his purchase of narco-attire accessories. The more intense images involve the beating, murder, and disposal of his victims. In one part of the sequence, we see Benny adding acid to a metal container while another narco (Jorge Zárate, known in the film as *El Huasteco*),¹⁷ holding a wooden oar, submerges and stirs a body with one leg sticking out. Known popularly as *El pozolero* (*pozole* maker), a reference to *pozole*, the traditional pork and hominy-based soup or stew popularly served during the holidays and important family functions, this individual is a cleaner who disposes of bodies in lye or acid for cartels. According to several periodicals, this individual did exist, but was not necessarily known at the time of the film's production. This particular killing and body disposal practice, however, was recognised among the cartels and the public. The tension of this horrific scene is broken as Benny gags while the film's El pozolero lets out a boisterous and smug laugh. Musically speaking, this section corresponds with the third stanza of and a key change in the *narcocorrido*, when Sánchez sings about how the two men became victims of the cartel's violence. The most disturbing moment occurs when Sánchez reaches the stanza's final line, indicating that Francisco Beltrán was not guilty of anything. In the montage, we see Benny and his comrade writing a sign that claims Los Reyes (spelled 'Relles') del Norte were responsible for the merciless killing, then stabbing it into the coarsely wrapped and discoloured remains of the body with a wooden stake. The synthesis of this line in the lyrics with the imagery of Benny and El pozolero disposing of the body suggests that perhaps this tortured victim was, like Beltrán, an innocent bystander as well.

Several images of the corpses during this montage are reconstructions ripped from the headlines of Mexican periodicals that feature graphic photographs of the victims of cartel violence, their bodies symbolically desecrated and bearing handwritten warnings. A notable mention is the reproduction of a beaten and bloodied corpse fitted with the Viva México sombrero, which received considerable attention in print media because

of its ironic and horrific use of an important national and cultural signifier during the Bicentennial and Centennial year. In the film, the *narcocorrido* details the most graphic and violent description of the men's deaths that showcases the brutality of the cartels, which is also referenced on-screen: 'They had their guts ripped out and a dog ate them'. While the music has been foregrounded for nearly the entirety of the montage, the *narcocorrido* fades slightly to the background when the scene transitions to a hotel room. Benny and El Cochiloco talk with an Anglo-American gun dealer, negotiating costs for an array of illegal assault rifles, bazookas, and grenades that are spread out on the bed. Sánchez sings the last stanza, pleading his listeners not to forget the victims of violence and to be careful with bad company, while on-screen, Benny, El Cochiloco, and the gun dealer ensure that with the purchase of more arms, the violence will not only continue but will escalate. Rather than exalting Benny's new role, this musical moment functions as a grim and dismal warning not just to Benny's conflicted transition to *sicario*, but also to his loss of morality to the narcoculture, concentrating on the intimidation and the death of so many at the hands of Benny and the cartel.

CONCLUSION

'*Nada que celebrar*' ('Nothing to celebrate'): this is the tagline that is printed on *El Infierno*'s official marketing posters, blatantly disapproving of the government-sponsored celebrations taking place during 2010 while the country continued to experience brutal violence, fear, and horrific death. Both IMCINE and Luis Estrada received considerable criticism from the government after the film's premiere; even then President Calderón criticised Estrada for making a film that placed the country and its people in such a negative and violent light, although at the time he had not actually seen it, but was rather relying on the commentaries of his advisors. The movie-going Mexican public, however, felt differently. For many, Estrada painted a caricature of the perverse relationship between transnational political powers and organised crime that reflected contemporary currents, including violent imagery ripped from the headlines. In that respect, it was seen as a homage to narcocinema and narcoculture, and a cautionary tale about what happens to displaced individuals when forced to cross borders for economic and familial survival. This led many to believe the film was not a fictional comedic-drama, but rather a pseudo-documentary that exposed and sarcastically criticised the

corruption and the brutality the country was currently facing. And music played a significant and influential role in this interpretation.

The film's musical selections work actively and strategically to reinforce the atmosphere of narcoculture while the musical moments specifically shape Benny's identity. As previously mentioned, *El Infierno* is Estrada's most musically-oriented film, featuring several examples of *música nortteña*, *rancheras*, and *narcocorridos*, both recycled and originally composed for the film.¹⁸ Small ensembles perform in the streets, in bars, and at funerals, while snippets of varying musics blast from car radios and nightclub sound systems, providing an aural sense of space and place. The focused attention on 'México-Americano' and 'El Crimen de Culiacán'—both songs are played in their entirety with visual montages edited to the song's rhythm and they are both connected to the protagonist Benny—indicates how significantly these musical moments shape our sense of Benny's changing and fractured identity. With 'México-Americano', Benny transforms into a deported immigrant, returning to Mexico after a twenty-year stay in the United States. While the upbeat and fast-paced example of *nortteña*-rock proclaims the pride of having two identities—one from Mexico and one from the United States—Benny's situation is much more dire, as he is thrown out of one country and returns to another that robs him and places him in a powerless and unprotected condition, regardless of his dual identities. This musical moment comments on the plight and current situation of many undocumented immigrants in the twenty-first century, forced to return to Mexico from the United States with the line 'don't come back'. In 'El Crimen de Culiacán', Benny realises he cannot make a life for himself and his family without joining the local cartel, which maintains economic control over the town and its residents. He quickly adapts to his new role as *sicario* despite Chalino Sánchez's grisly warnings about men who were tortured and killed without compassion in his *narcocorrido*. Much like in 'México-Americano', the music moves in counterpoint to the actions and images on screen, providing scathing and sarcastic commentary on Benny's new (albeit forced) identity and foreshadowing his inevitable demise for his association with the cartel. In both these musical moments, music is the major conduit for Estrada's harsh criticism, unforgiving of Benny's actions and circumstance.

NOTES

1. The Bicentennial marks Mexico's Independence from the Spanish Crown, which was an insurrection that took place in 1810–1821. The Centennial signifies the Civil War of the Mexican Revolution (1910–1920), which began as an uprising against the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz. His reign of power lasted roughly thirty-five years from 1884 to 1911. Both historical events are considered crucial to Mexico's national identity and have been used by many cultural institutions to promote a unified history and common identity through the population.
2. This initiative, initially labeled as '*Operativo conjunto Michoacán*' ('Joint Operation Michoacán'), began on December 10, 2006, just nine days after then President Calderón took office. The intention was to combat organised crime, in particular the Cartel de la Familia Michoacana. After this, Mexico initiated the War on Drugs. For more information, see Jones (2016).
3. *La ley de Herodes* or *Herod's Law* was one of Estrada's most controversial cinematic endeavours during the end of the 1990s. Set during the period of the Miguel Alemán's *sexenio* (1946–1952), the film follows the problematic ascent to power of Juan Vargas (Damián Alcázar), a janitor turned mayor of a small Mexican town who quickly becomes absorbed in political corruption and greed. The film was a blatant commentary on the workings of the PRI that maintained control of the Mexican government for the majority of the twentieth century. Estrada's film was so critical and inflammatory to the history of the party (and is the first film to openly criticise the political party by name), which at the time was still in power, that the Mexican government had the film censored. This action only led to its popularity with the public.
4. In *La ley de Herodes*, Estrada utilises mambos by bandleader Dámaso Pérez Prado in order to highlight the popular soundscape of the 1940s; in *Un mundo maravilloso*, Estrada utilises contemporary Mexican pop music to shape the urban landscape; and *La dictadura perfecta* features a compilation of musical tracks from the nineteenth century western art tradition including Ludwig van Beethoven's Symphony no. 9, Gioachino Rossini's *William Tell Overture*, and Edvard Grieg's *Peer Gynt Suite*.
5. For more information about the important role music maintains in these genres, see Avila (2019).
6. For example, in the prostitute melodrama, the female prostitute protagonist is intimately tied to Latin American dance musics, such as the rumba and the danzón, performed in spaces of sexual commerce such as cabarets and nightclubs. Because of the location and function, these musics in the film became culturally tied to sexuality and sensuality, aurally painting the female prostitute as a figure (or object) of desire.

- In the *comedia ranchera*, the singing *charro* (Mexican cowboy) protagonist typically performs *canciones rancheras* (ranch or country songs) that demonstrate his virility, his *machismo*, and his ties to the countryside. See Avila (2019).
7. This has also transitioned into television entertainment with the *telenovelas*, Spanish-language soap operas that are broadcast on television. Those produced and funded in Mexico featured many popular contemporary performers who specialise in a variety of musical genres and styles. The narratives intertwine with their music, the lyrics, and their own performances to create an artistic hybrid that audiences find appealing.
 8. The depiction and fictionalisation of narcoculture has been especially prominent in *telenovelas* and dramatic serials on streaming media platforms such as Netflix. Two of the more popular shows to gain notoriety in the last decade have been the Televisa produced *La reina de sur* (*Queen of the South*, 2011 and 2019) and Netflix's *Narcos* (2015–2017).
 9. In his study entitled *Narco Cinema: Sex, Drugs, and Banda Music in Mexico's B-Filmography*, Ryan Rashotte borrows the phrase *nuevo cine de narco* from film critic Sergio Ramos. Ramos defines this genre as 'the old videohome aesthetic imbued with art-house chic'. Rashotte lists a few films that fall in this category with *El Infierno*, including *Miss Bala* (2011), *Salvando al Soldado Pérez* (*Saving Private Pérez*, 2011), and *Heli* (2013). See Rashotte (2015: 159).
 10. The origins of *banda* music are military bands, featuring a variety of brass and woodwind instruments and percussion. The repertoire consists mainly of waltzes, polkas, and marches but is fairly flexible in regards to genre. *Música norteña* (or simply *norteña*) is from the north part of Mexico and Southwest Texas, a juxtaposition of musical styles from German, Czech, and Polish settlers. *Norteña* music features the accordion. For information on both *banda* and *norteña* music, see Madrid (2013) and Ragland (2009).
 11. For a discussion on the concept of soundscape, see Murray Schafer (1993).
 12. His music is also featured in the iconic Tex-Mex documentary *Chulas Fronteras* (1976) that focuses on migrant farm workers and on how music is used as a form of social protest. See also his short entry entitled 'Corridos of the Chicano Movement: Rumel Fuentes' on the Smithsonian Folkways website: <https://folkways.si.edu/rumel-fuentes/corridos-of-the-chicano-movement/latin-world/music/album/smithsonian>.
 13. Translation of lyrics are by the author.
 14. For more information on Los Lobos, see the band's official website: <http://www.loslobos.org/site/>.
 15. Germán Valdés or Tin Tan was a popular Mexican comedian during the 1950s through 1970s Mexican cinema. His popularity was particularly

startling as the *pachuco* character. *Pachuco* were typically Mexican American males who sported a zoot suit and spoke a vernacular that included Spanish, English, and Caló. He was also known for his ability to sing and dance in a wide variety of genres and for his ability to perform slapstick. For more information about Tin Tan in Mexican cinema, see Avila (2018). For more information about the *pachuco*, see Paz (1985) and de la Mora (2006).

16. Sinaloa is a state on the western coast of Mexico near Baja California. It is considered one of the most violent states in the country, the majority of which is affiliated with cartel traffic and violence. Sinaloa, especially the city of Culiacán, has served as a popular backdrop in *narcocorridos* from the 1970s through the 1990s. For more information, see Wald (2001).
17. *Huasteco* refers to the population living in the northeastern states of Mexico, the region around the Gulf of Mexico.
18. There is one *corrido* that was especially written for the film. 'Corrido de J.R.' was composed by Santiago Ortega with lyrics by Luis Estrada and Rodrigo Santos. It functions diegetically in the film, performed at the funeral of Jesús Reyes 'J.R.' (Mauricio Issac), the son of Don José Reyes, by the *conjunto* 'Terquedad Norteña'.

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LIST OF SONGS

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- ‘El Crimen de Culiacán.’ 1992. Chalino Sanchez (pf). Nacho Hernandez (comp.). © Musart.

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PART IV

From Romance to Dystopia



Can You Hear the Love Tonight? Creating Cinematic Romance with Diegetic Songs

Katja Hettich

Against the red sky of burning Atlanta, Rhett Butler pulls Scarlett O'Hara into his arms. In a tight close-up, he passionately declares his love and asks for a kiss. With their noses only a whisper away from each other, Rhett bends his head and presses his lips onto Scarlett's: the romance reaches a crescendo as do the violins of Max Steiner's music score.

Music has a deep and direct impact on our emotions. Hence, it does not come as a surprise that iconic love scenes like the one from *Gone with the Wind* (1939) typically rely on music to emphasise their romantic climaxes and to make the audience feel the proverbial bliss of a heaven full of violins.¹ Aside from the 'unheard melodies' of classical scores (Gorbman 1987), songs have been, from early on, an integral part of romantic encounters on screen. Film scenes that are regarded as highlights of cinematic romance, are often musical moments, in which 'music, typically a popular song, inverts the image-sound hierarchy to occupy a

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dominant position' (Herzog 2009: 7). Based on this observation, this chapter explores a particular type of musical moment: romantic film scenes in which songs are used diegetically. The aim is twofold: First, the chapter will highlight the potential these song moments have to portray, reflect and shape conceptions of romantic love and to create various forms of cinematic romance. Second, it seeks to propose some starting points for analysing them in more detail.

The first section defines cinematic romance from a genre studies perspective and conceptualises it as an affective experience created by film through narrative and stylistic means. The second section outlines some characteristics that place songs and cinematic song moments in a special relationship with the romance experience. By looking at three recurring types of romantic song performances in non-musical films, the third section gives an idea of how different narrative set-ups, performance styles and diegetic audiences influence the shaping of romance. The fourth section examines the special case of romantic song moments that consist in situations of joint listening. Finally, the concluding section briefly points out how the investigation of song moments can contribute to further research on cinematic romance in the realm of cultural analysis.

EXPERIENCING CINEMATIC ROMANCE

What is cinematic romance? Definitions of the genre are commonly based on the subject matter. Hence, a romance film is a 'film in which the development of love between the two main characters is the primary narrative thread, the main story line' (Preston 2000: 227). But such a definition leaves out a key aspect of the genre, an aspect that for most viewers is one of the main reasons to choose a romance film over, say, a horror movie or a western: the characteristic affective experience associated with it. Following approaches that suggest viewing genres in terms of the cognitive and affective experience they offer (see Williams 1991; Grodal 1997 amongst others), it is a major issue that romance is rarely examined as a distinct genre experience. Instead, it is common practice to discuss romance only in the light of its two most common varieties, the romantic comedy and the romantic drama or melodrama. However, both are characterised by their very own emotional qualities and physiological effects: the romantic drama 'wishes to evoke tears; the romantic comedy [...] aims for laughter' (Glitre 2006: 9f.). The distinctive qualities of the romance experience itself, which can be embedded in a wide variety of

other genre constellations, is not investigated either in the one case or in the other.

To close this gap, I suggest we should consider two points: First, cinematic romance is best examined as a local phenomenon that may or may not correspond to the global narrative and stylistic mode of a film. Second, more attention should be paid to the stylistic and experiential qualities of romance, which tend to be neglected in favour of narration. Love plots and romantic moments are an integral part of most Hollywood films, regardless of their dominant genre affiliation (see Bordwell et al. 1985: 16; Staiger 1997). In order to take a broad view of the phenomenon of romance in film, it is worthwhile to also consider films whose central plot does not focus on a love story. Cinematic romance manifests itself in particular moments in film which can be examined against the background of what Smith calls 'genre microscripts': 'Inter-textual expectation sets for sequences and scenes' which film viewers 'have gathered from real-world experience and from encounters with other genre texts' (2003: 48). By examining cinematic romance through close analyses of paradigmatic moments rather than entire films, it is possible to grasp how the interplay of micro-scripts from different genres or the combination of conventional romance aesthetics with unconventional narrative formulas modify genre expectations. It also allows us to study in more detail not only narrative constellations but also the aesthetics of cinematic romance, the experiential qualities of its *mise-en-scène*, camera movements, editing, sound design and use of music.

Sociological studies on romance (e.g. Luhman 1986) stress the fact that what is perceived (and marketed) as an authentic feeling, even as a natural force, is framed by communicative codes, media representations and, as Eva Illouz (1997) argues, the ideology of consumer capitalism. Yet it cannot be denied that romance is also an emotional reality. People actually have experiences that they classify as romantic love, and cinema goers have certain expectations of the emotional gratifications they might get from films labelled as romance. Unlike the comedy, thriller or the body genres described by Williams (1991), cinematic romance cannot be linked with somatic reactions as obvious as laughter, startle reflexes, tears or sexual arousal, nor can romance be conceived of as a basic emotion like happiness or fear. Nevertheless, romantic film moments unquestionably have an emotional and visceral impact on their audience, which is, like the romance experience in real life, characterised by a set of body sensations, perceptions, attitudes and behaviour tendencies.

Intense moments of romantic love are accompanied by body reactions that are activated through neurotransmitters and hormones. They stimulate an individual's sensations and can be measured: a pounding heart, heightened energy, focused attention, feelings of euphoria, a sense of safety and reduced anxiety and stress levels (see Aron et al. 2006: 603; Carter 1998). It goes without saying that the experience of cinematic romance differs in many respects from the feelings of romance in real life. In this context, it is useful to mention Carroll's distinction between 'art-horror' experienced in film viewing and natural horror provoked by actual events in the real world (1987: 51): to achieve its emotional effects, the horror genre uses cues that generate fear and disgust in real life. In the safe context of film viewing, these cues, however, stimulate pleasurable art-horror as an emotional but also specifically cinematic experience. Accordingly, it can be said that cinematic romance aims to evoke feelings and sensations associated with the real-life experience of being in love but conveys them through the means of cinema as an aesthetic experience.

THE ROMANCE OF CINEMATIC SONG MOMENTS

Along with narration, strategies of character engagement through sympathy and empathy, and audio-visual style, music is a particularly effective means of evoking romance feelings in film. Music can provoke a wide range of affective responses and induce powerful experiences that might even strike listeners as sublime (see Bicknell 2009: 23–44). Musical features like melody, rhythm, tempo, dynamics, mode, instrumentation, timbre and register affect our brains and resonate inside our bodies. They can move us to tears or make us smile and elicit psychophysiological responses that listeners conceive of as chills or thrills (see Harrison and Loui 2014). It is therefore reasonable to assume that music is capable of triggering sensations that are also involved when we experience love.

By adding images and narrative context to diffuse musical sensations, film music has a particularly great potential to stimulate bodily responses that correspond to experiences of romance in real life. In romance scenes, music interacts with the emotional and cognitive effects of the filmic narration and audio-visual stylistic devices. Following Audissino's gestalt theory approach to the analysis of music in film (2017) as well as considerations on the cognitive and affective reception of audio-visual metaphors (Whittock 1990; Fahlenbrach 2016), it is likely that there are correlations between the audio-visual and musical style of romantic musical moments

and the embodied experience of romance as expressed in conceptual metaphors of (romantic) love (Kövecses 1988). It can be assumed that the association of music and moving images turns the reception of romantic musical moments into a quasi-synesthetic experience, making romance perceptible as a transcendent multi-sensory event (Hettich 2021).

Outstanding musical moments touch us to the core. They are often built around what Phil Powrie (2017) calls ‘crystal-songs’: emotionally intense combinations of songs and images that are epiphanic, insofar as they mark narrative and psychological turning points in which past, present and future coalesce. Given the impact songs have on the body, brain and mind, they are, on the one hand, experienced as something very personal. On the other hand, the effects of music on brain mechanisms stimulate attachment behaviour and social bonding, leading Jeanette Bicknell to argue ‘that listening to music—even solitary listening—is best thought of as a social phenomenon’ (2009: 60). Thus, musical song moments are at once highly personal and communal in nature, which makes them a perfect vehicle for creating an experience of social intimacy (Bicknell 2009: 109–115) and romance. Leaving aside the ‘romantic’ potential of music in general, the following section will focus on the specific case of diegetic songs in film, and their relation to cinematic romance.

In many ways, the functions and effects of songs in film resemble those of classical scores. Like instrumental film music, songs help establish the setting of a film, they create atmosphere and serve a variety of narrative and thematic functions. However, some of their peculiarities make them particularly suited to portray, reflect and create the experience of romance.

In songs, musical means of expression are complemented by lyrics and the human voice. This combination exceeds the possibilities of a musical score to express a character’s state of mind and to provoke corresponding emotional responses in listeners. Psychological studies indicate that the presence of vocals in a song enhances listeners’ emotional arousal (Loui et al. 2013). Singing merges verbal utterances with pre-semiotic forms of aural expression,² and humans are very sensitive to the subtleties of the voice, which is one of the first connections to their social environment outside the womb.

Their lyrics also make songs an effective medium of romantic intimacy and passion. Supported by the power of music, they express thoughts and feelings with an intensity and persuasiveness that surpasses the capabilities of other verbal means of expression (Frith 1998: 158–182). Whereas

words alone often fail to grasp the subtle feelings, sensations and longings that go along with the experience of romance, the interplay of music, lyrics, voice and performance can lift verbal formulas out of the mundane.

Many musical moments include previously released pop songs. In this case, the intermedial nature of the songs charges them with further meanings that affect the cinematic experience. Audiences may associate these songs with personal memories, and with emotions they experienced when listening to them in real life, alone or with significant others. Moreover, popular songs are highly culturally codified. They represent group identities and function as vehicles for collective sentimentality and nostalgia. On the one hand, their embeddedness in cultural memory stimulates a sense of social connectedness. On the other hand, the awareness that love songs and their performances are cultural artefacts can prompt audiences to reflect on the discourses and practices of romances they represent. In this case, a musical moment may remind film viewers that romance is a cultural fabrication, and potentially prevent them from being absorbed in the experience.³

The potential of songs to both reflect and create romance in film is particularly evident when they appear diegetically. When a song dominates the diegetic time and space of a film, characters that are present in the scene necessarily interact with it, be it by performing it, singing or humming along, moving to the rhythm, dancing and even by just quietly listening to it. Thus, diegetic song moments have a privileged status when it comes to characterisation and character engagement. They are an effective way to express the feelings of the singer. But they also reveal much about characters who do not sing themselves but initiate the musical moment by putting on a record as well as about characters who are listening and reacting to diegetic songs. These reactions can refer to various things. First, the song itself can be thought to trigger emotions in characters and create an emotional connection between them and both the singer and other diegetic listeners. At the same time, the film viewer is likely to be emotionally aligned with the character through the shared listening experience as we shall see below. Second, characters can react to the fact that the song is being played, a typical example being a scene where one character performs a song to declare their love to another character. This type of romantic song moment typically engages the film viewer through empathy and sympathy. Third, when a character consciously perceives a song as a cultural artefact, her reactions may also reveal her attitude towards the discourse of love represented in the lyrics

and towards the cultural identity the musical style of the song stands for. This third case aligns the character and the film viewer in a special way as it blurs the boundary between innerdiegetic and extradiegetic space: the viewer gets the impression that they are part of the same audience, responding to the song, the narrative context of its performance and its formulas of romance. In addition, the film viewer also reacts to the character's reactions, which thus influences the effects of the musical moment as a whole.

Following these considerations, diegetic song moments can be regarded as complex communicative events with several components that have to be taken into account when describing them and analysing their functions in terms of cinematic romance: the song itself (with its musical features, its lyrics and its cultural background), the singing voice and performance, the narrative context and the way the song is integrated into the film, the diegetic audience and the audience in front of the screen. In view of these many factors, a comprehensive investigation of the form and functions of romantic musical moments goes beyond the scope of this chapter. However, the following sections will give an idea of which aspects might be interesting when analysing and comparing different films. The underlying assumption is that diegetic song performances can be regarded as communicative acts that have the function to create romance in the diegetic world of the film as well as to convey the experience of cinematic romance to the film viewer. Two description tools will be used for the analysis. Taking the cue from Rossi's work on the presence of song in film (2010), the following section will, first, make use of Jakobson's typology of language functions (1990).⁴ Jakobson's model distinguishes six elements that are involved in a communicative act, each of which determines a different communicative function. For the analysis of romantic song moments, the following functions are particularly relevant: (1) the emotive function, which focusses on the addresser; (2) the conative function, which focuses on the addressee; (3) the phatic function, which focusses on the contact between the communication participants; and (4) the poetic function, which focuses on the communicated message for its own sake. As a second tool, the following descriptions will draw on Sternberg's triangle theory of love (1986), in which love is considered to involve three interacting components: intimacy, passion and commitment. Drawing on Jakobson's typology of language functions and Sternberg's psychological theory of love, the following analyses aim to answer two questions with regard to specific song moments: which communicative

elements are predominant with regard to the mediation of romance, and which aspects of love are emphasised?

ROMANTIC PERFORMANCE MOMENTS

Professional Stage Performances

Throughout film history, stage performances of characters succeeding as professional singers have been a common way of integrating songs diegetically into films. Professional performances of love songs do not necessarily entail cinematic romance in the sense defined above, but they often do. The narratives of musical biopics and films about fictional musicians typically have a dual focus on the private and professional lives of their protagonists and establish a correlation between romantic coupling and song performances.⁵ Hence, in romantic song moments, the emotive function of a song as a means of communication is often connected to the artistic value of its performance: A star's ability to express his love in a convincing and engaging way underlines both the depth of his feelings as a lover and his musical talent and charisma as a stage performer. In this vein, a romantic musical moment is even capable of putting the negative narrative outcome of a love story into perspective. At the bittersweet end of *Bodyguard* (1992), Whitney Houston's rendition of 'I Will Always Love You' is a powerful expression of Rachel's feelings (see Fig. 11.1). Given the fact that Frank (Kevin Costner), whom Rachel clearly has in mind when she sings this song, is not present during the concert, the conative function of the singing act as a confirmation of love and its phatic function in regard of the lyrical 'I' and 'you' are weak. Instead, the scene creates an intimate closeness between the singer and the film viewer. The latter, unlike the diegetic concert-goers, shares with Rachel the knowledge of the deeper meaning of the song, which in an earlier scene had been the subject of a conversation between her and Frank. As to the mediation of romance, the most important factor of this scene is, in Jakobson's terms, its poetic function: it is an affirmation of romance that is grounded not in the narrative but in the film viewer's engagement with the musical moment. Thus, it celebrates romance as an aesthetic experience that is provided by the film despite its narrative outcome, namely the couple's final separation.

Another subcategory of professional song performance in film is the stage duet performed by two lovers (or lovers to be). Lady Gaga's and



Fig. 11.1 Whitney Houston's rendition of 'I Will Always Love You' (Courtesy Warner Home Video)

Bradley Cooper's Oscar-winning performance of 'Shallow' in *A Star Is Born* (2018) exemplifies how the song as such, the singing, the circumstances of its performance and the narrative context work together to highlight certain aspects of romance. The vibes of the diegetic concert in front of the packed Greek Theater in Los Angeles heighten the emotional intensity of this ballad about longing for change and fearing it. It also emphasises the phatic contact between the couple during their duet. The musical moment mediates romance through the energy of the stage performance, the flirtatious interaction between the two singers and the harmonious blending of their voices, revealing their chemistry as both artists and lovers. This scene also is an example of a narrative that occurs frequently in films about artists: one of the characters giving his partner the opportunity and self-confidence to make the most of himself or herself. The duet marks impressively the eponymous birth of Ally as the 'star' the film's title refers to. Jackson's encouragement and his invitation to sing the song with him on stage gives her the opportunity to let her talent shine. The performance not only testifies to the protagonists' musical skills and the emotional connection between them, it also shows romance as a power that enables individuals to rise above themselves, as a motor for artistic self-realisation.

Intimate Singing

In a different way than in stage duets, romance and self-realisation are linked in another type of films about music-making: Films about song-writing often feature characters who develop a great closeness and bond with each other in the process of creating a song together, and eventually fall in love. Despite major differences in their genre affiliation, production style and narrative strategies, *Once* (2007) and *Music and Lyrics* (2007) have in common that they develop their romance by showing how characters who initially lack confidence in their ability to succeed become a source of encouragement and inspiration to each other. As in *A Star is Born*, the duets in both films emphasise the phatic function of their singing. In contrast to the stage performances described above, in which strong physical presence and powerful voices convey the impression of musical and romantic passion, the musical moments of the latter two films are characterised by romantic intimacy, which is not only evident in the lyrics, instrumentation and singing style, but also in the settings, framing, camera work and lighting. Compared to the brilliant star appearances in most musical films and music biopics, the singing is more unpolished, almost amateurish.

In *Once*, Markéta Irglová's and Glen Hansard's mellow and raw singer-songwriter sound accentuates the introspective character of their songs. In one scene, they perform 'Falling Slowly' as a duet that is equally powerful and energetic as the 'Shallow' number in *A Star is Born*. But instead of a concert for a huge audience, they sing in an unglamorous music store, and their understated performing style places emphasis on the song as an expression of their inner life as does the almost documentary film style. The song moment thus creates an intimate atmosphere that reflects the inner connection of the couple and allows the audience to feel close to the characters, to share their experience of romantic longing.

In *Music and Lyrics*, the finished version of 'Way Back into Love' is heard for the first time when Alex (Hugh Grant) and Sophie (Drew Barrymore) sing it in rehearsal in his study before the song ends up being the highlight of a stage performance by pop star Cora (Haley Bennett), for whom it is composed. This song moment does not achieve its emotional impact through musical brilliance and star charisma. Rather, the singing, while not bad, is decidedly unprofessional, and the nervous quirks of the two characters lend the performance a tenderness that creates an atmosphere of romantic intimacy. The vocals are initially supported only by

a recorded keyboard, before an acoustic guitar joins in and eventually percussion is added when the song is played, after an audio dissolve, over images of the couple rushing to their meeting with Cora.

Intimate song performances that constitute a romantic musical moment can also be found in films that are not centred on music-making. In scenes in which amateur musicians sing together (e.g. *Juno*, 2007), one character deliberately sings to another (e.g. *Before Sunset*, 2004), or is surprised by the latter while singing (e.g. *Stranger than Fiction*, 2006). The individual shape the romance takes in these examples would have to be examined through close readings that take into account all the factors of song performance outlined above. What they have in common is that they privilege the factor of intimacy, which, according to David R. Shumway (2003), has dominated Western discourse on love and pop-cultural representations of romance since the 1970s, leaving notions of passionate love and romantic courtship in the background.

Public Confession Songs

A third type of song moment combines characteristics of the former two: scenes featuring song performances in which characters assure their loved ones publicly of their romantic feelings. The public singing here has less the function of a concert but can be seen as a performative act that the audience witnesses as mere bystanders. What matters here is the emotive and conative function of the song. In accordance with conventions of romantic comedy, this kind of performance often serves to affirm the personal transformations protagonists undergo for or because of love. Musical song moments of this type mark the beginning, a climax or a turning point of a love story, at which the confession or affirmation of love towards the partner initiates the next course of action. It promises that obstacles to the union will be overcome. Songs are used here primarily to highlight the commitment component of love.

An example for this type of musical moment in which a character's song performance proves that he is ready for true love can be found in the Belgian-French comedy *Podium* (2004). Towards the end of the film, the ambitious amateur singer Bernard (Benoît Poelvoorde) wins back his wife Véro (Julie Delpardieu) by choosing to perform, at a televised celebrity lookalike competition, a love song by her favourite singer, Julien Clerc, instead of an upbeat disco number by his own great idol Claude François on whom he is fixated to the point of almost losing his family.

Underlining the conative function of the performance, the narratively significant choice of the song contributes substantially to the romance of the musical moment, as do the lyrics which express the singer's emotional commitment to a lyrical 'she'. In contrast to the song performances in *The Bodyguard* and *A Star is Born*, Poelvoorde's rendition of 'Ma préférence' does not impress with vocal brilliance, but with disarming simplicity and sincerity. It begins as a shy a cappella version that exposes the character's vulnerability. His humble singing is gradually supported by non-diegetic strings, the gentle audio dissolve lifting the performance into a romantic realm. Although Véro is not present at the concert, she is clearly the implicit addressee. Cutting back and forth between Bernard on stage and Véro who is watching the show on television, gives the impression of them being co-present, and stresses the narrative function of the performance: It is Bernard's last hope to reach out to his alienated wife and convince her of his commitment for her. The alternation between increasingly close shots of him singing soulfully with puppy-dog eyes, and close-ups of her being moved to tears and softly singing along proves that this hope is fulfilled. The musical moment re-establishes the phatic contact that was previously missing in the communication between the couple. Thus, it fosters the idea of romance based on intimacy and commitment.

It must be noted that confessional song performances do not in all cases have an intimate character. Take for example Heath Ledger's extrovert and skilful performance of 'Can't Take My Eyes off You' in *10 Things I Hate About You* (1999). Here it is the excessiveness of the public commitment and the youthful passion expressed by the male protagonist with his powerful physical presence that are crucial to the romantic effect. Nevertheless, in recent cinema, the increased importance of intimacy is reflected in a tendency towards musical declarations of love, in which songs are presented in an amateurish, 'authentic' style which often bears on what Claudia Gorbman has characterised as 'artless singing'. Song moments in the mode of artless singing can be very effective for the mediation of romance as shared intimacy. According to Gorbman, it is precisely the reduction of musical means and 'the imperfections in the voice—breathiness, faltering and quavering, false notes, singing out of comfortable range, pauses, forgotten or mistaken lyrics' (2011: 159)—that give these moments their expressive power. As she says, 'a character singing artlessly is normally indulging in an intimacy, conveying a truth, externalising a subjectivity' (2011: 159). An example

is Rick Moranis's rendition of 'Close to You' in *Parenthood* (1989) which Gorbman describes as a 'touching scene' in which artless singing 'has at its mission to get the character together, to bond them through singing' (2011: 162): By singing the cheesy love song in a daringly clumsy way, in the middle of a classroom full of teenagers, he not only moves his schoolteacher wife to the point that they get back together, he also touches a romantic chord within the film audience.

JOINT LISTENING

A particularly interesting type of romantic song moment are scenes that focus on two or more characters listening to a diegetic song together. Joint listening in films occurs in manifold constellations which evoke diverse forms and stages of romance and can reveal different attitudes to the discourse of romantic love. A representative survey of these variations would require a separate study. However, a brief description of some examples will outline the factors that can be taken into account when analysing moments of joint listening to songs: the relationship between the listeners, their attitude towards the song and its performer, the circumstances that lead to the joint listening, the spatial setting of the scene and the reactions and activities the characters engage in while listening.

Cameron Crowe's *Say Anything* (1989) features an iconic musical moment that varies the confessional performances described above in that the protagonist does not sing himself but plays a recording of 'In Your Eyes' by Peter Gabriel to express his feelings for Diane (Ione Skye). The morning after Diane gives in to the pressure of her father and breaks up with Lloyd (John Cusack), the latter holds up a boombox under her bedroom window, wordlessly expressing his determination not to give up his love through song. Although the two characters are physically separated, the scene establishes a strong sense of mental closeness between them. The couple seems to be connected not least by the fact that the song was also playing the first time they slept together. In this case, listening together goes hand in hand with remembering together.

In an early scene of *Before Sunrise* (1995), Céline (Julie Delpy) and Jesse (Ethan Hawke), who have just met on a train, are put into the small listening booth of a Viennese record store. The intimate listening situation in the confined space, the flirting couple's reactions to the sentimental folk song ('Come Here' by Kath Bloom) and their exchange of

shy glances make the chemistry between them palpable and mediate the feelings of excitement and insecurity that characterise the beginning of falling in love.

Moonrise Kingdom (2012) pictures the sweetness and awkwardness of adolescent love by framing the first kiss and awakening sexuality between two teenagers as a listening and dance scene, accompanied by the French song ‘Le temps de l’amour’, sung by Françoise Hardy. On the run from her family and his scout troop, Suzy (Kara Hayward) and Sam (Jared Gilman) make camp on a solitary beach where they set up a portable record player. After taking a bath, Suzy puts down the needle on the turntable. She brings Sam to her, and both begin to move to the music (see Fig. 11.2). At first, they dance separately, with a distance between them, before Sam grabs Suzy’s hands. They sway together in a wide embrace and look into each other’s eyes. They kiss, and Sam touches Suzy’s breast. Hardy singing about a time of love and adventure provides the fitting soundtrack to this moment of cinematic romance. The fact that the song is played by Suzy adds a hint of self-reflexivity to the scene. At the same time, this gesture underlines her determination to engage in the romance with Sam despite the objections of those around her, which enforces the atmosphere of intimacy and trust that characterises this musical moment. The contrast of the sober seriousness with which they talk about the physical dimension of their awakening sexuality, and the innocence and awkwardness of their first attempts at physical contact bring some heart-warming humour to the scene without ridiculing the characters’ romantic feelings.

The experience of another stage of romantic relationship is conveyed through a song moment at the end of *High Fidelity* (2000). After Rob (John Cusack) has overcome his midlife crisis and his fear of commitment, he is finally back together with Laura (Iben Hjejle). The final scene before the epilogue takes place at a release party for a single produced by Rob. When his obnoxiously extroverted colleague Barry (Jack Black) gives a surprisingly pleasing performance of Marvin Gaye’s ‘Let’s Get It On’—which Rob had previously referred to as ‘our song’ when talking to Laura—the musical moment brings perfect closure to all the storylines. It not only demonstrates the unity of the central couple by showing Rob holding Laura, both swaying to the music and kissing each other. Barry’s soothing voice, the lyrics and the shots that alternate between the performance on stage and the enthusiastic audience (amongst them



Fig. 11.2 Suzy and Sam dance on the beach in *Moonrise Kingdom* (Courtesy Universal Pictures)

characters in the narrative) create a celebratory mood of harmony and interconnectedness that reaches out to the audience in front of the screen.

An interesting moment of joint listening occurs in the German film *Alle anderen* (*Everyone Else*, 2018) by Maren Ade.⁶ Although viewers would probably not classify *Alle anderen* as a romance film at first glance, it is imbued with romance. On the one hand, the question of how to deal with the devalued signs and practices of romance as an enlightened postmodern couple in their thirties is a constant topic in the protagonists' (Birgit Minichmayr as Gitti and Lars Eidinger as Chris) conversations and actions. On the other hand, the film aims to create a sense of romance by revealing the shared romantic longing and the vulnerability that the characters try to hide behind a wall of irony. This entanglement culminates in a scene in which the couple and two dinner guests play a track from a CD that Chris's kitsch-loving mother left in the family's holiday home: 'Ich hab dich lieb' by singer-songwriter Herbert Grönemeyer, very popular in German-speaking countries since the 1980s. The hymn-like character of the sentimental love song is underlined by the fact that it is played in a live version with the recorded concert-goers singing along at the top of their voices. The singer's open-hearted lyrics and performance style as well as his reputation for appealing to the masses stand in stark contrast to the

critical attitude and self-conscious demeanour that Gitti and Chris display in matters of love as well as to their cultural snobbery.

Just as Grönemeyer's song triggers ambivalent and partly conflicting reactions in the characters, the musical song moment is likely to trigger even more complex feelings in the viewer, resulting from the interaction of sound, images and narrative context. Hans's blatant contempt for the song, the excessive enthusiasm of his wife Sana (Nicole Marischka) and Chris and Gitti's uneasiness with the other couple's reactions and their own are presented against the backdrop of the sentimental love song. Characters as well as film viewers can mentally distance themselves from the discourse of romance represented by it, but none of them can escape the physical effects of listening to the music and the singing. Initially, Chris and Gitti exchange nervous glances and self-conscious smiles. But by listening to the song which addresses feelings of vulnerability and longing the couple is too embarrassed to talk about, they gradually overcome their initial defensiveness and open up emotionally to each other and the romance of their shared listening experience. This romantic song moment brusquely ends when Hans, all of sudden, turns off the music in the off-screen space with a snide remark—a rupture of the musical moment that demonstrates all the more the power joint listening to a song has to create a strong sense of romantic intimacy on and off screen.

CONCLUSION

The diegetic presence of songs in film can contribute in manifold ways to the depiction of romantic love and the creation of cinematic romance as an affective experience for the audience. Based on an understanding of diegetic song moments as communicative events, we can determine which communicative functions a song predominantly assumes in a certain scene and which aspect of romance it thereby emphasises, both within the diegesis and in communication with the film spectator. The short analyses presented above have focused on three common types of musical moments in which song performances expose different aspects of 'romantic love'. Professional stage performances that pay homage to the power of love and show the exceptional talent of individual singers or, in soulful duets, the magical connection between two artists, tend to underscore the passionate side of romance and link it to the topos of self-realisation. In contrast, song performances in more private settings usually emphasise the aspect of intimacy. A third type of diegetic song

moment is public performances in which romance is not expressed in the artistry of singing but singing itself as a performative act becomes the means of romance. The public confession of love in the mode of non-professional or even artless singing then acts as the greatest possible proof and medium of romantic commitment. In addition to these three types of song performance, the description of musical moments in which recorded songs are played diegetically has illustrated that scenes where characters do no more than listen also have a performative character and can fulfil various communicative functions with regard to romance.

Despite certain tendencies, even the short analyses above have shown that no simple assignment of a performance type and a specific aspect of romance is possible: each film combines the elements to be considered individually, such as the constellation of performer(s) and diegetic audience, the character of the song, the nature and quality of the performance, the narrative background, the genre context, and the stylistic mode of the scene. The examples outlined give only some starting points for an investigation of romantic song moments, which future research has to elaborate in a more detail.

My approach of considering diegetic song moments not only in terms of their narrative function, but also in terms of their ability to convey romance, is part of a project to reconceptualise cinematic romance in general (see Hettich 2021). The appeal of exploring the genre beyond plot lies in the potential it offers to link textual and cultural analysis. Studies in sociology indicate that the constantly changing discourses and practices of romance are not only reflected but also shaped and even created by media products (see Giddens 1992; Illouz 1997; Shumway 2003). By exploring romance as a mode of cinematic experience that is in principal not bound to specific plot constellations (like the everlasting union between a heterosexual couple), we might be able to grasp even subtle variations in the conception of romance in a specific historical and cultural context.

NOTES

1. According to a German proverb, those in love are not only in seventh heaven, but their heaven is also 'full of violins' ('hängt der Himmel voller Geigen') (Keith Spalding, *An Historical Dictionary of German Figurative Usage*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1959–2002, S. 958.

2. Dyer gives as examples ‘breath and the unpremeditated sounds of crying, yelping, whimpering, and [...] such not-quite-spontaneous (or not always, perhaps not often) vocalisations as keening, laughter and orgasmic yells and the special register of whispering, hissing, calling and shouting, as well as [...] mumbling and stuttering’ (2011: 2).
3. It is in this light that film scholars have identified a trend towards the self-reflective use of pop music in romantic comedies since the 1970s (see Neale 1992; Krutnik 1998; Heldt 2012). Neale states that in the ‘nervous romances’ of the late 1970s, the self-conscious use of diegetic love songs reflects the protagonists’ skeptical attitude towards the discourse of romance that has lost its innocence and credibility. In the ‘new romance’ cycle of the 1990s, however, popular romantic songs recur as signs of a ‘persistent evocation and endorsement of the signs and values of “old-fashioned romance”’ (1992: 295–296).
4. Rossi also refers to Jakobson’s functional categories, but he limits their application to the analysis of lyrics. I understand language functions in a broader sense as communicative functions that are not limited to linguistic utterances but can also be applied to non-verbal signifiers.
5. In this regard, Schlotterbeck (2010: 136–201) notes a shift in the depiction of love: In biopics of the 1970s through 1990s, song performances tend to be less integrated with the narrative of the protagonist’s personal life and feelings, and music figures more as an obstacle to his or her private relationships instead of being a source of emotional closeness and a means to convey romance. In the 1990s and the 2000s, the genre maintained the practice of integrating song performances in realistic settings while it revived some romantic elements of the classical musical by connecting music to the development of the protagonists’ intimate relationships.
6. For a more detailed discussion of this scene see Hettich (2018).

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- ‘Let’s Get It On.’ 2000. Jack Black (pf.). Marvin Gaye (comp.).
- ‘Ma préférence.’ 2004. Benoît Poelvoorde (pf.). Julien Clerc, Jean-Loup Dabadie (comp.).
- ‘Shallow.’ 2018. Lady Gaga and Bradley Cooper (pf.). Anthony Rossomando, Andrew Wyatt, Lady Gaga, Mark Ronson (comp.).
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Desperately Funny: Comedy, Performance and the Musical Moment in *Toni Erdmann* (2016)

Rhiannon Harries

In an interview about her 2016 feature *Toni Erdmann*, director Maren Ade expressed surprise at its broad reception as comedy: ‘I don’t think the film is a comedy. It’s a drama where you laugh sometimes. It’s so funny that people are calling it a comedy’ (Peranson 2016: n.p.). That many critics classified the film as such is partly explained by the fact that, as Lauren Berlant and Sianne Ngai note, comedy is ‘both an aesthetic mode and a form of life’ (2017: 233), and *Toni Erdmann* is about a man, Winfried (Peter Simonischek), for whom the comic is a form of life he holds personally and politically dear. Dismayed by what he sees as the humourless corporate conformism of his daughter Ines (Sandra Hüller), semi-retired music teacher Winfried travels from Germany to Romania, where she works as a management consultant, and stages a series of

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bizarre interventions by showing up at Ines's workplace and crashing social events in the guise of life coach Toni Erdmann. In a cheap suit, dishevelled wig and false teeth, Winfried makes little attempt to play Toni with credibility and courts ridicule. During these sequences, the film integrates the aesthetics of comedy into its realism, but if Winfried is trying to make his daughter laugh—or, perhaps, 'crack up'—it's rare that the film is inviting the audience to do the same. Although Toni's appearance and patter, and the baffled reactions of Ines's business associates, may sometimes be amusing, Ines's decidedly unamused responses—panicked horror, cold irritation, aggressive or just exhausted compliance—mean that occasions for laughter here are frequently edged out by our sympathy for her less than joyful feelings. In this sense, the film is not a comedy so much as it is about comedy, and about the social relations which shape and are shaped by humour, or its absence. Though much of the film's reception emphasises the redemptive power of the comic—and it is true, as Ade says, that in *Toni Erdmann*, you do laugh sometimes—it is in the failure of Winfried's attempts at comedy that the film does its most interesting work, tracing the psychic dynamics of the estrangement between father and daughter and its intersection with fraying communal bonds and new affective experiences of alienation under post-industrial capitalism.

The most illuminating of Winfried's stunts takes the form of a musical performance, a standout scene in which, as Toni, he quietly coerces Ines into singing to a room full of strangers at a party while he accompanies her on keyboard. Hüller's rendition of 'The Greatest Love of All', made famous by Whitney Houston's 1980s cover, gives rise to some of the singular effects that, for Amy Herzog, distinguish the musical moment from other instances of music in film, disrupting the dominant image-sound hierarchy, introducing aesthetic and thematic excess, and interrupting linear narrative flow (Herzog 2010: 7–8). During the film's Cannes press screening, the Houston number reportedly drew spontaneous applause, though perhaps less as an expression of the pleasure with which Herzog associates the musical moment than an eruptive release of more ambiguous affect that mirrors that of the scene itself. Hüller's vocal performance, for instance, is neither triumphantly good nor hilariously bad, but it is spirited and unexpectedly exhilarating in a film largely built on terse exchanges of words and looks. At the same time, although the situation is farcical, the song choice ludicrous, there is a sense that something serious is taking place between father and daughter. Though moving, the scene falls short of catharsis, and nor can it be read as the

achievement of the kind of authentic selfhood, wrested from professional conformity, that Winfried's pranks seem intended to produce. Instead, in the same way that ageing '68er' Winfried fails to understand the dwindling counter-cultural force of his investments in performance and play, humour and creativity, Ade's deployment of the musical number reflects disquietingly on the capacities of particular aesthetic and dramatic forms to escape recuperation by their late capitalist context.

Although Phil Powrie acknowledges that the musical moment does not necessarily yield 'radical destabilisation of cultural forms' (Powrie 2017: 11) and Herzog notes that it indeed may 'work towards more conservative ends' (Herzog 2010: 8), both are understandably drawn to instances that open, if vanishingly, towards difference and change. In this, they inherit Richard Dyer's interest in the future-oriented, utopic possibilities of the musical as genre (Dyer 1992). This chapter considers the more ambivalent affects and function of *Toni Erdmann's* musical moment, which speaks not so much to visions of the good life—intimate, political and economic—as to their frustration. The first section sets out how comedy, performance and two instances of diegetic music reveal fractures in the father-daughter relationship that coincide with the disintegration of attachments to particular ways of living and working in the contemporary world. Engaging Ngai's account of 'zany' comedy as a strenuously light-hearted aesthetic that exhibits the cross-coupling of play and work increasingly characteristic of performance-driven capitalism and affective labour, it argues that comedy and performance in *Toni Erdmann* are not emancipatory, but dishearteningly central to the experience of alienation. The second section turns to the Houston number to examine how, in this context, the musical moment takes up the more modest work of capturing not utopia, but what the present feels like, sounding the depths of the disappointments with which any imagining of the future would have to contend.

I

The intertwining of comedy, performance and music with broader social and political issues is established early in *Toni Erdmann*, in the first of its three distinct sections. The film opens with Winfried, in Germany, and swiftly characterises him, on the one hand, in terms of a self-conscious commitment to an eccentric sense of humour and, on the other, as a sad figure, mutely aware of his advancing age and uncertain position in the

world. In the first scene, he pranks a harried courier on his doorstep, declining to accept a parcel before retreating into the house and eventually re-emerging, in a deliberately unconvincing disguise, declaring that he's 'looking forward to defusing' the package. Typifying the responses of the film's characters to Winfried's practical jokes, the courier looks uncertain but remains politely tolerant, clearly itching to escape and continue his deliveries. In his designation of *Toni Erdmann* as a contemporary update on the classic Hollywood screwball comedy, 'in which a mischievous madcap disrupts the staid life of an uptight character s/he loves', David Bordwell notes the socio-economic inequality upon which the genre's comedy often depends, as spectators are invited 'to sympathize with people who have enough money and leisure to punk everyone around them' (Bordwell 2016: n.p.). The opening scene touches on this differential knowingly, hinting at the manner in which Winfried's unexamined, luxurious faith in humour and play as emancipatory forces will be unpicked over the course of the film.

The importance of creativity, specifically concerning music and performance, to Winfried's sense of identity is elaborated further in another early scene, as we see him directing a musical number at a high school assembly to mark a colleague's retirement. Winfried and his students take to the stage in black-and-white face paint, resembling the skull-like masks associated with the Mexican *Day of the Dead* holiday, for an egregiously tasteless death-themed tribute. Although Ade's commitment to realism precludes the use of extradiegetic music in her films, instances of diegetic music that punctuate them are often significant, even where they might not be characterised as musical moments. We hear only a few lines of the 1972 song, 'Heute hier, morgen dort' ('Here Today, Tomorrow There') by Hannes Wader, but the performance connects Winfried's investment in humour with his cultural and political formation. While the number, conceived—we assume—by Winfried and not by the minimally enthused student performers, bespeaks a delight in wilfully transgressing the bounds of taste and social acceptability, the song also historicises his association of humour and play with the political potential of art and creative expression more generally. We might already assume the sixty-something Winfried to be, as Anne Fuchs describes him, a 'member of the left-leaning German post-war generation' (Fuchs 2019: 169), but the choice of song confirms this, a metonym for the German folk music that functioned as 'an artistic medium for the political protest of the

1968 students movement [...] as well as being a popular commercial commodity for a left-wing intellectual public' (Robb 2007:1).

Ade cuts abruptly to the following scene at Winfried's ex-wife's house, where a party is taking place to celebrate a flying visit by Ines, but the irreverent performance built around Wader's song by Winfried continues to subtly inform this sequence, and the film as a whole, in its articulation of a set of ideals which simultaneously unite and divide father and daughter. The lyrics of 'Heute hier, morgen dort' describe the itinerant life of a musician, celebrating movement, change and freedom—values that plainly speak to the cosmopolitanism, anti-authoritarianism and liberalism of Winfried's generation. But what Winfried fails to recognise, and what *Toni Erdmann* will gradually make clear, is that his progressive '68er' values are the very stuff that, in the late twentieth century, came to shore up the neoliberal project of financialisation and corporate globalisation of which Ines is—to his apparent disappointment—an avatar. Capital's 'new spirit', in Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello's account, arises from its absorption of artistic critiques of rigid bureaucracy that culminated around 1968 (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005). With the shift from the 'solid' modernity of Fordist capitalism to the 'liquid' of the post-industrial, Zygmunt Bauman writes that '[n]owadays capital travels light—with cabin luggage only' (Bauman 2000: 58), conjuring the figure—not unlike Wader's musician—of the globe-trotting managerial class to which Ines visibly corresponds. In a smart black suit and blouse, her blandly immaculate, boardroom-to-bar attire strikes a contrast with Winfried's casual clothes and smudged face paint, and their etiolated intimacy is disclosed in an awkward embrace. He greets her fondly with a childhood pet name but stains her jacket with make-up as they hug, and retreats glumly to the bathroom to wash his face. She is visibly concerned by the blood pressure monitor beneath his shirt, but her surprise registers that they are not in close contact. When Ines disappears to take another work call on her mobile, Winfried remarks drily to his ex-wife, 'We did something wrong'.

As he leaves the gathering after a conspicuously brief stay, Winfried's parting conversation with Ines reveals a sharper note in his humour that recalls philosopher Henri Bergson's reflections on laughter's disciplinary social function—'above all, a corrective' that is by no means 'invariably inspired by sentiments of kindness or even of justice' (1911: 197). When Ines explains that she will not have time to visit Winfried's mother before her return to Romania the next day, he makes a deadpan quip that he can

ask the ‘substitute daughter’ he has hired instead. Without missing a beat, Ines shoots back: ‘Great. She can call you on your birthday so I don’t have to’. Though it is not heated, their dialogue is mirthless, betraying entrenched mutual resentments and alluding to the encroachment of work into the private sphere and personal relationships. Winfried’s joke about outsourcing Ines’s daughterly duties is a dig not only at her absence from family life and its gendered responsibilities (in an earlier scene, we see Winfried himself deliver ready meals to his elderly mother and greet her cleaning lady), but also at the nature of the consultancy work that has occasioned that absence. It is possible to read Winfried’s engagement of humour here as an attempt to diffuse the tension around the encounter or to inject into the conversation some levity, with a view to ‘loosening up’ his daughter, along the lines of the screwball dynamic. But if Bergson famously claims that the cause of laughter is a ‘rigidity’ or ‘inelasticity’ in its object—‘something mechanical encrusted on the living’ (1911: 37)—this is not to be conflated with the uptight or a stiff adherence to norms, but refers to non-adapted behaviour that society corrects and fends off through ridicule or its threat. As Michael Billig writes, for Bergson (unlike Freud), in the comic ‘[a]ny rebellious function is secondary’ and ‘the primary link is between conservatism and laughter’ (Billig 2005: 132). Though we may have sympathy for Winfried’s hurt (he cuts a lonely figure at the party compared to his remarried ex-wife), submerged in Winfried’s joke is a reprimand of Ines for abandoning her domestic duties and the reproductive labour of care that might be expected from a daughter in particular. Here a legitimate personal wound shades into something censorious and patriarchal, suggesting that forms of exploitation are not as foreign to Winfried’s ideas of the good life as he believes. If the joke is intended to produce shame, however, Ines refuses it, assuming with defiant enthusiasm the brisk professional identity that distinguishes her from her father and complicating the madcap/staid relation of the screwball comedy that Bordwell identifies in the film. Ines may be staid, but she recognises her position and the generic dynamic as such, and reveals her own capacity for performance as she mimics and redirects her father’s humour back at him.

Winfried’s horror at his daughter’s lifestyle is manifest in the film’s second section, in Bucharest. Arriving unannounced for a visit, Winfried waits in the lobby of her office until Ines arrives with some colleagues. Quickly donning sunglasses and slipping in a set of false front teeth, he sidles up to the group and walks in step beside his daughter. Though

she registers him with a startled glance, Ines does not stop, seamlessly continuing her conversation and disappearing into an elevator. It is a quiet but decisive moment in the narrative, an unmistakable moment of the rejection of a parent by a child that also seems to convey the contempt of one generation, and one worldview, for another. As Winfried, Simonischek's expression here is hard to read, as though something passes through him with which he cannot consciously reckon, but which will inflect the conflict between father and daughter over the rest of the film. In a review, Peter Bradshaw articulates something of this dynamic and its almost unspeakably negative affect, when he writes that Ines is 'embarrassed by her silly, sad, borderline sociopathic old dad', and also ashamed of her embarrassment, while Winfried is not only 'ashamed on her behalf', but 'convulsed with an emotion very like hate at the realisation of how little she thinks of him' (2016: n.p.). Winfried leaves, perhaps intending to come back later or simply return to Germany, but he is chased down by a young Romanian woman who introduces herself as Ines's assistant. Acting as a cross between substitute daughter and travel guide, she talks Winfried through hotel recommendations and relays Ines's instructions to meet her that evening after work.

Over the next two days—fraught even by the standards of most parental visits—Winfried bears witness to his daughter's tireless occupational performance and its colonisation of her life, trailing Ines in activities that resemble the post-industrial work paradigm described by Boltanski and Chiapello, which emphasises networking, short-term business projects and a flexibility that erodes distinctions between work and leisure. Though he tries to fit in and to be kind to his daughter, every attempt misfires. A shared joke with a business contact, whom Ines is trying to cultivate, for example, succeeds only in humiliating her and forging a paternalistic alignment between Winfried and the middle-aged man, an ill-judged move that reveals not only his limited understanding of the conditions of his daughter's life, but a disavowed complicity with some of the most demeaning of them. He initiates a conversation with Ines about happiness, to which she responds with hostility, although he is hardly wrong to intuit that his daughter is 'miserable in ways that she can't entirely recognize or acknowledge' (Scott 2016: n.p.). But just as he fails to see that humour and performance are not inherent social goods, he is oblivious to the way in which the idea of happiness, as Sara Ahmed argues (2010), may function as a technique to orient individuals towards certain

objects and life choices—family, marriage and heterosexual intimacy—that may be oppressive. A little later, Winfried asks Ines, less kindly, ‘Are you really human?’, and though he later apologises, the visit ends on a downbeat note.

For most of what remains of the film, Winfried appears only as alter ego Toni. His second visit comes as a surprise for both Ines and the spectator, when a man in a bar at which she and some friends are standing suddenly turns to offer them champagne and she is aghast to see it is her father, this time in full costume of wig, false teeth and sharkskin suit. Rattled, she runs with his act and shakes his hand as he introduces himself as ‘Toni Erdmann’. Winfried’s persona as Toni is deliberately overdetermined. Claiming to be a ‘life coach’, Winfried apes the behaviours of Ines’s corporate world with a nonsensical twist, name-dropping that he is a friend of Romanian billionaire Ion Tiriac, for example, then adding that Tiriac is not returning his calls because he is upset over the death of his pet turtle. The intentions behind Winfried’s performance are opaque—‘[a] bizarre attempt to ... what? Bully her? Make her laugh? Make her cry?’ (Bradshaw 2016: n.p.) Writing of the absurd comic character, Bergson notes that laughter may, briefly at least, be sympathetic—‘we treat him first as a playmate [...] he abandons social convention [...] our first impulse is to accept the invitation to take it easy’ (195, 196). But, according to Bergson, ‘we rest only for a short time’ and, inimical to feeling, laughter remains a corrective social gesture that restrains eccentricity through fear of the embarrassment of becoming an object of ridicule. Notably, Bergson uses the example—whose terms the film appears to reverse—of ‘a stern father’ who ‘may at times forget himself and join in some prank his child is playing, only to check himself at once in order to correct it’ (197). As Toni, Winfried appears to be soliciting ridicule, as if to present Ines with the choice of aligning with her workmates in laughing *at* him—daring her to publicly reject him—of playing along with his anarchic script in loyal and sympathetic amusement, ‘taking it easy’, as Bergson puts it, abandoning her work and risking ridicule herself.

In the event, however, Ines’s colleagues do not ridicule Winfried/Toni, but in fact take little notice of this strange interloper, accepting his presence with only mild confusion and the odd nervous giggle. Fuchs reads this in terms of an ‘unsettling slippage’, as Ines’s corporate friends fail to unmask Winfried because ‘their own entanglement in constant professional role play and a world of simulation has crippled their sense of

judgment about the underlying reality' (2019: 174). However, their nonplussed responses might also register a more profound ambiguity around role-play and performance and a convergence between work and leisure, acting and being, in which the notion of a distinctly authentic, unalienated 'underlying reality' disappears. The question, then, is not why nobody calls Winfried out for his fakery—which, after all, is no more artificial than Ines's business presentations or feigned enthusiasm at shopping with a colleague's wife—but why nobody really laughs at him, and why Ines, though playing along with her father, does not at any point seem to be having fun. Fuchs finds the disruptive force of the Bakhtinian carnivalesque in Winfried's performance, but I am inclined to see it—and, I would suggest, its failure to be either unambiguously funny or genuinely disruptive—in terms of its 'zaniness', as a number of reviews label it (Jones 2017: n.p.; O'Hehir 2017: n.p.). In her analysis of the 'zany' as an aesthetic category, Ngai argues that although insistently playful and entertaining, zany comedy has 'a stressed-out, even desperate quality that immediately sets it apart from its more light-hearted comedic cousins, the goofy or silly' (2012: 185). Describing it as 'a style of incessant doing', she suggests that, in its contemporary form, the zany and its contradictory affects bespeak the 'politically ambiguous intersection between cultural and occupational performance, acting and service, playing and labouring' increasingly characteristic of post-industrial capitalism (2012: 181).

Accordingly, although Winfried might consider his improvisational turns as Toni to be a subversive intervention in his daughter's corporate milieu, they are, for all their silliness, in fact more or less consonant with its norms and bear no qualitative difference from the autonomous performance required of the post-industrial service worker—hence his failure to elicit ridicule. By drawing Ines into his act, Winfried is not liberating his daughter from work, but multiplying her labour. In another striking instance of diegetic music, Ines seems to register, with despair, the hopelessness of Winfried's efforts and the further burden they place upon her. Letting him tag along with her and her friends to a nightclub, Ines appears unable to find enjoyment in either the supposedly desirable trappings of her lifestyle or in her father's game. An electro house remix of 'Safe and Sound' by LA duo Capital Cities drowns out conversation while Ines's friends dance exuberantly and spill champagne as she sits at a distance from Winfried/Toni. Like 'The Greatest Love of All', 'Safe and Sound' is unusual in its lyrics' reference to love beyond the romantic; its refrain, 'I could lift you up/I could show you what you wanna see/And

take you where you wanna be’, speaks equally to friendship or indeed a parental relationship. The track—which topped the German charts in 2013 after appearing in a Vodafone advert—is ultra-commercial fare, its lyrics literal and corny, but perhaps precisely for that reason it makes for a poignant, anempathetic soundtrack as Ines shares a long and wordless exchange of looks with her father, tears running down her face, before she gets up and leaves alone. If the Wader song is Winfried’s ‘theme’, this might be Ines’s—pre-packaged, insistently uplifting electropop redolent of the ‘euphoria in unhappiness’ that Herbert Marcuse associates with the compensatory commercial pleasures of life under advanced capitalism (1991: 5).

II

Given the film’s cumulative elaboration of the ‘becoming-labour of performance’ that Ngai identifies in zany comedy (2012: 233), it is unsurprising that there should be significant implications for the Houston number as an instance of the musical moment involving diegetic performance under late capitalism. Fuchs reads the scene as part of a narrative of transformation, whereby Winfried’s role-playing ‘cracks [Ines’s] social veneer’, eliciting ‘a form of self-expression that literally gives voice to her longing for personal empowerment’ (2019: 175) and constituting one among the film’s several ‘disruptive performances of father and daughter [that] will have a lasting effect’ (180). In this regard, Fuchs finds in it some of the functions and characteristics of the musical moment as theorised by Herzog (rupture and difference) and of the crystal-song set out by Powrie (change and authenticity), both drawing on the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze. Although it is true that there are suggestions of all these things in what is a highly affective scene (hence the applause at Cannes), there is also an important way in which they are undercut by other, less joyful, aspects, which are made legible by situating the performance within the context of comedy, and the zany in particular. Perhaps more than any other of Winfried’s stunts, the Houston song seems engineered to unseat Ines from her social and professional conformity—in these terms, surely nothing could be more embarrassing, and therefore freeing, than spontaneously singing a cheesy ballad to a group of strangers? However, it is also the scene in which the failure of his interventions and their complicity with the norms he assumes that they subvert is made most clear. And if Ines ‘plays along’, entering fully into the zany,

it is with a mixture of ‘rage and elation’ that Ngai sees at the heart of the aesthetic (2012: 218), more a reproach to her father than reconciliation. In the same way that Winfried’s role-play as Toni is too congruous with its context to elicit laughter or ridicule, this musical moment asks what remains of its own transformative, utopic potential within a capitalist work paradigm now barely dissociable from artistic performance.

In several ways, the film builds expectations that the Houston performance will deliver what Powrie describes, with reference to the crystal-song, as a ‘moment of revelation and intense, often epiphanic feeling’ that may ‘mark turning points in the narrative or the character trajectory, usually transitions from dystopia to utopia’ (2017: 198, 222). After an especially tense day together visiting an oil refinery whose workers will be made redundant by Ines’s restructuring project, the personal and political impasse between father and daughter receives its most direct articulation in a bitter exchange on the drive home. When Ines falls asleep in the car, Winfried asks her driver to make a detour to the home of a Romanian woman he has met earlier in the film. A small Easter party is taking place and the pair—this time posing as the German ambassador and his ‘secretary, Miss Schnuck’—are welcomed inside. Coming almost two hours into the film, we might assume that this will be the final scene and, though incorrect, this sense of an ending and possible resolution is also invited by the film’s organising structure, which resembles what Rick Altman describes as the ‘dual-focus narrative’ of the Hollywood musical (1987: 20). The latter, like the screwball comedy, is driven less by the chronology and progression of plot than by parallels and oppositions between two characters, usually of ‘opposite sex and radically divergent values’, and difference is ultimately, if problematically, conquered through romantic love and music (20). Accordingly, when Winfried announces that they will perform a song and Ines, trying to leave, reluctantly begins to comply, it does seem that something extraordinary and possibly climactic is about to occur.

In his elaboration of the ‘crystal-song’, Powrie uses Deleuze’s notion of the ‘crystal-image’ to model a category of musical moment that places a particular emphasis on time, gathering and refracting past, present and future. The ‘Greatest Love of All’ performance offers something close to this in its evocation of the song’s place in a personal history of father and daughter, the evolving associations of the song as cultural object, and through its lyrics. When Winfried/Toni picks out the opening bars on a keyboard, he glances across at Ines as if to cue her in and there is a

strong sense that this is a reprisal of past scenes of performance of this song. That both know their parts by heart seems the legacy of time once spent pleurably together as father and child. As Claudia Gorbman notes of amateur or ‘artless’ singing in film, beyond the musical genre, scenes of song often work to bond characters, and a common trope of the two-person song or ‘duologue’ involves ‘parent and child sharing a song as an externalisation of their close bond’ or else re-establishing that bond via the ‘direct and credible route to intimacy’ of a song from their past (Gorbman 2011: 163).

Though there is a palpable trace of earlier closeness in Winfried and Ines’s performance, the choice of this particular song is ironic in its inadvertent embodiment of precisely those features of late capitalism that have contributed to their estrangement. Though, as Herzog and Powrie make clear, the formulaic structures and commodity form of popular music can and do engender meaningful aesthetic experiences, the decision to use ‘Greatest of Love of All’ seems to emphasise the progressive hollowing out of this potential. Inspired by the life of boxer Muhammad Ali and originally recorded by George Benson for the 1977 biopic *The Greatest*, the song’s lyrics may be trite, but the narrative of self-empowerment they relate—‘I decided long ago/ Never to walk in anyone’s shadows/ If I fail, if I succeed/ At least I’ll live as I believe’—resonates more convincingly if heard in the context of Ali’s Civil Rights activism and conscientious objection to the Vietnam War. The song makes direct references to childhood and futurity (‘I believe the children are our are future’), questions of inter-generational responsibility (‘Teach them well and let them lead the way’) and an idealised, joyful past (‘Let the children’s laughter remind us how we used to be’), all of which speak very obviously to Winfried and Ines’s situation and in some ways echo the crystallisation of different moments that Powrie describes. The lyrics might be merely too platitudinous for the song to offer Gorbman’s ‘direct and credible route to intimacy’, but there is something more specific in the song’s recording history and circulation as cultural artefact that forecloses this possibility and works instead to diagnose the breakdown of the father-daughter relationship as it coincides with the broader disintegration of modes of solidarity and resistance under late capitalism.

A much bigger hit for Houston in 1986, the song’s music video also involves a parent-child relationship, with an appearance from Houston’s real-life mother Cissy, as the lyrics are dramatised and reconfigured as the narrative of Whitney’s transformation from gifted child (played by a

young actress) to superstar (Whitney playing herself). In the same way that Houston's broader image and sound was deliberately 'white-washed' by record executives to ensure mainstream commercial appeal, the video in particular works to drain the song of its association with the sacrifices of political struggle and replace it with a narrative of personal success and celebrity, earned and deserved through a mixture of innate talent and self-belief. It is a perfect neoliberal script, in which self-respect (the 'greatest love of all') becomes indistinguishable from individualism and narcissism (in the video Houston is literally singing to herself), hence the song's notable appearances in Brett Easton Ellis' novel *American Psycho* (1991) and Mary Harron's film adaptation (2000). In Ellis's satire of the violence of advanced capitalism and consumer culture, New York banker and sociopath Patrick Bateman professes his admiration for Houston's music and for 'Greatest Love of All' in particular: 'One of the best, most powerful songs ever written about self-preservation and dignity [...] a state-of-the-art ballad about believing in yourself'; '[s]ince it's impossible in the world we live in to empathize with others, we can always empathize with ourselves' (Ellis 2015: 254). That Houston herself met an early death after struggling with problems, including addiction and a troubled marriage, that seemed to stem partly from the difficulty of inhabiting a persona cultivated for her by record labels and, notably, her parents, invests the song with further sad irony.

It is striking that, of all songs, it is this one that Winfried practised with his daughter as a little girl and that he is now apparently employing as a means of liberating her from the conditions of a culture which the song has served to celebrate. In contrast to the 'open circuit' of Powrie's crystal-song, Ade's choice of 'Greatest Love of All' seems saturated with the thwarted possibility of authentic change or of an unalienated position beyond capital, specifically by way of artistic expression and cultural performance. In this it corresponds to another, minor function of the crystal-song, not an instance of 'pivotal and inevitable change', but 'an intense moment of recognition of the state of things' (2017: 229), since the song is a distillation of the film's demonstration that Ines, in her work and lifestyle, has all along been singing a tune her father taught her, albeit in a distorted form that he has been unable or unwilling to recognise. As Nancy Fraser writes, the success of the neoliberal project depended on the alliance, in the 1980s, of a 'deeply regressive political economy' with 'progressive forces from civil society' (2019: 13). By combining

an ‘expropriative, plutocratic economic program’ (11) with ‘a recognition ethos that was superficially egalitarian and emancipatory’, taking in ‘ideals of “diversity”, women’s “empowerment”, LGBTQ+ rights, post-racialism, multiculturalism, and environmentalism’ (which would be interpreted only in the narrowest of ways), a progressive-neoliberal bloc achieved a hegemony that is now itself in crisis (13). In its declension from homage to the counter-cultural figure of Ali to neoliberal anthem, beloved by reality TV singing contests, the song reflects the way in which the politics of Winfried’s generation have been enlisted in the service of late capital and reveals that what Winfried sees as his daughter’s abandonment of his values is in fact the expression of what she has inherited only too directly.

Fraser identifies a number of symptoms of this global crisis in hegemony, including the election of Donald Trump, Brexit and the increasingly precarious legitimacy of the European Union, finding in these events the political expression of a rejection of neoliberalism and of its deleterious effects on the social order that has not yet been met by a progressive counterhegemonic alternative. *Toni Erdmann* dramatises this crisis at a number of levels, through its broad depiction of exploitative economic relations between unevenly developed EU states Germany and Romania, and through its tracing of the political dimensions of the fractured relationship between father and daughter. It is the Houston number, however, that affectively condenses ‘the state of things’ and something of how it feels to live this crisis, at least from the perspective of Ines. By singing the song, Ines submits to her father’s demand to ‘take a break’, in Bergson’s terms, and though clearly reluctant at first, her vocal and bodily performance gains momentum. As Ines, Hüller uses her hands and face expressively, closing her eyes and clenching her fist at appropriate moments of emotion and by the chorus she is singing at full volume, her face flushed, with something nearing abandon (see Fig. 12.1). The sheer energy that she brings to the performance tips it into the realm of the zany, as the strenuous effort normally dissimulated by the virtuosic performer is made palpable and what ought to be joyful sounds suspiciously laborious. Winfried’s invitation to play thus takes Ines straight back to work; neither her father nor the politics of his generation and its investments in cultural performance can liberate her since both have been directly involved in her formation as the flexible subject of global capital.



Fig. 12.1 Ines at full volume (Courtesy SODA Pictures)

Caught in this closed loop, Ines and *Toni Erdmann*'s musical moment seem to find themselves in what Berlant calls the 'situation' or 'impasse', an affective structure of the present wherein the disappointment of normative ideas of the good life in the face of economic, political and intimate upheaval is accompanied by the breakdown of representational genres which might once have reproduced the same good life fantasies. For Berlant, the impasse denotes a scenario of 'living on in the ordinary, where subjectivity is depicted as overwhelmed, forced to change, and yet also stuck' (2011: 21) that finds aesthetic corollary in the waning of generic conventions and dramatic events which no longer seem to make sense of a world increasingly disorganised, rather than organised, by capitalism. Although Berlant tracks situations and impasses in more muted forms of realism in cinema, a similar waning of genre might be seen in a number of ways in *Toni Erdmann*: first, in its zaniness as a form of comedy that has, in its late capitalist context, become increasingly unfunny; second, in the musical moment as another instance of the zany, not only in terms of Ines's character's multiplying performances, but structurally, as one genre (realism) makes a precarious attempt to incorporate another (the musical) in a similar manner to the ever-expanding repertoire of roles of the post-industrial worker. If the musical moment elsewhere erupts into other filmic genres to bring with it aspects of the

musical as genre, here neither the latter's more conservative conventions (the superficial bridging of difference, for example) nor its more subversive potential survive fully intact.

Nevertheless, if the utopian dimensions of the musical moment and crystal-song seem largely barred here, the very frustration of possibility produces another kind of authenticity and minor change—although not in the ways suggested by reviews and readings of the film that foreground the pleasurable affects of the scene or claim its transformative effect on Ines. As Ngai's account emphasises, if one end of the zany's polarity lies in play and elation, at the other sit desperation and anger. In interview, Ade says that what she wanted from the Houston number was 'for Ines to sing that song as though she doesn't want to sing it...there has to be an option where the way of singing is to say "fuck you"' (MacFarlane 2016: n.p.). Elsewhere, the director describes repeatedly rehearsing and recording the scene to the point where Hüller herself became tired and irritable, incorporating her displeasure into what became the final take. Regardless of its extra-filmic motivation, the energy that Hüller brings, unsmilingly, to the song has a quality that is difficult to read as anything but anger. Ngai notes that 'zaniness often seems to involve the destruction of not just any object but of ones specifically designed for fun, as if in revolt against the compulsory pleasure that defines it' (2012: 185). Here, Ines's consent to perform the song, but refusal to enjoy or to perform authentic enjoyment of it, can be read if not as a rebellion against the imperatives of her father and advanced capitalism, then at least a furious demonstration of the way in which both converge in a demand for her affective labour. Her discharge of her daughterly duty is revealed as the immaterial reproductive labour it always was, and in its indiscernibility from the gendered performances now required by her work. Between the two, a credible fantasy of the good life towards which the musical moment might reach seems lacking, and there is a sense in which the performance seems finally to give shape to an impasse Ines has experienced all along.

However, although the performance reveals Ines's entrapment, it does produce, if not change, then adjustment—for Winfried as much if not more than for Ines. Throughout the number, the camera cuts to him as he plays and watches his daughter sing with close attention (see Fig. 12.2). When the song finishes, Ines gives the small audience and their appreciative applause a perfunctory nod, then leaves the party and her father without a backwards glance. He follows her, but changes his mind and takes up a seat on the apartment stairs; he shakes his head as he removes

and contemplates the false teeth, as if in recognition that his interventions as Toni have come to an end. Explaining himself to the party hostess, he admits that Ines is his daughter and says he came to Romania ‘to see how it is here and how she lives and...it’s very complicated’. Though he struggles to give words to the experience, the musical moment has been a scene, if not of transformation, then of learning and unlearning for Winfried, as he begins to better understand the conditions of his daughter’s life and to reassess the norms by which he had judged its separation from his own. In *Toni Erdmann*’s final scenes, Toni does not reappear and the film weaves back and forth between the promise of change and its frustration, in a dynamic similar to that of the musical number. A surreal lengthy sequence, the last in Bucharest, involves a work party that Ines spontaneously hosts naked (although she quickly and easily reinscribes this into the service of ‘team building’) and at which Winfried appears in completely unrecognisable form in a shaggy Bulgarian folk costume and mask. The pair share what seems to be a wordless rapprochement in what once again looks like a climactic scene, but—much like the present crises of late capitalism—the film keeps going. We find ourselves back in Germany, where little has changed besides a slight thawing in the personal relationship between father and daughter. Attending the funeral of Winfried’s mother, Ines is about to relocate to the Far East for a new job. She and Winfried share a brief exchange in the garden at the wake, in a more amicable replay of their encounter at the start of the film. At one point, Ines even reaches into Winfried’s pocket to pull out Toni’s false teeth and place them in her own mouth. But when Winfried goes to get his camera, Ines is left alone; after a few moments, she removes the teeth and, in the film’s final, ambivalent shot, she stares despondently into the distance.

CONCLUSION

Commenting on Jacques Derrida’s *Spectres of Marx* (1994), a text that—like *Toni Erdmann*—explores questions of duty, capital, patriarchy and Europe, Nancy J. Holland wonders ‘what becomes of the daughter’ in Derrida’s attention to spectral encounters between fathers and sons that, for Derrida, open towards ethics and politics (Holland 2001: 65). *Spectres* opens with the figure of Hamlet’s ghost, invoking a law of filiation and inheritance which, despite Derrida’s critique, makes little room for



Fig. 12.2 Winfried watches Ines (Courtesy SODA Pictures)

the feminine. In response to the assertion which begins Derrida's text—'I would like to learn to live finally'—Holland makes her own: 'A father cannot teach a daughter how to live; he can only teach her the limits within which she must live' (2001: 65). Winfried's interventions as Toni have more than a hint of the ghostly visitation about them, as well as educational intent. But, as my reading of the film and its musical moment have made clear, Winfried's life coaching and 'magisterial zaniness' (Morgernstern 2016: n.p.) reveal time between father and daughter to be 'out of joint' in a manner that obstructs ways of living before opening new ones. The politics of his generation, and his related attachments to humour, art and creativity, are not ineffectual because outdated in the face of late capitalism, but all too contemporary in their coincidence with post-industrial labour and its hegemony. Winfried's attempts at emancipation—teaching his daughter how to live—therefore collapse into the further entrainment of her as post-Fordist worker. In this context, the utopian aspects of the musical moment—joy, authenticity and change—face a particular, historically specific struggle to take flight, as heaving one's heart into one's mouth, as *King Lear's* Cordelia has it, is disclosed as a relentless, often gendered, demand of both professional and personal life. Nevertheless, as Berlant notes of living through the impasse of crisis,

‘being treads water; mainly, it does not drown’ (2011: 10). Despite floundering in its delivery of the more affirmative functions of the musical moment, the Houston number participates in a tracing of the experience of the present that has something to teach Winfried—and us. Though we might, as spectators of film and as subjects of late capital, hope for forms of art and life that escape alienation more decisively, Berlant reminds us that the impasse, though lacking the event-like qualities more typical of the musical moment, is nevertheless a time of happening during which we might fully encounter and reckon with our present condition in order to move beyond it.

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