CHAPTER 1

From Unheard to Meaningful: When Music Takes Over in Film

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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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A. K. Windisch et al. (eds.), *When Music Takes Over in Film*,
Palgrave Studies in Audio-Visual Culture,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-89155-8_1

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.

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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 Gaï Ramaka's *Karmen Geï* (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.

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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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