



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

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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 Dépardieu) 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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- 10 Things I Hate About You*, 1999, Gil Junger, USA.
A Star Is Born, 2018, Bradley Cooper, USA.
Alle Anderen, 2009, Maren Ade, Germany.
Before Sunrise, 1995, Richard Linklater, USA/Austria/Switzerland.
Before Sunset, 2004, Richard Linklater, USA/France.
Bodyguard, 1992, Mick Jackson, USA.
Gone with the Wind, 1939, Victor Fleming, USA.
High Fidelity, 2000, Stephen Frears, UK/USA.
Juno, 2007, Jason Reitman, USA.
Moonrise Kingdom, 2012, Wes Anderson, USA.

- Music and Lyrics*, 2007, Mark Lawrence, USA.
Once, 2007, John Carney, Ireland.
Parenthood, 1989, Ron Howard, USA.
Podium, 2004, Yann Moix, Belgium/France.
Say Anything, 1989, Cameron Crowe, USA.
Stranger Than Fiction, 2006, Marc Foster, USA.

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- ‘Falling Slowly.’ 2012. Glen Hansard, Markéta Irglová (pf.). Glen Hansard, Markéta Irglová (comp.).
- ‘I Will Always Love You.’ 1992. Whitney Houston (pf.). Dolly Parton (comp.).
- ‘Ich hab dich lieb.’ 1995. Herbert Grönemeyer (pf.). Herbert Grönemeyer (comp.).
- ‘In Your Eyes.’ 1986. Peter Gabriel (pf.). Peter Gabriel (comp.).
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- ‘Way Back into Love.’ 2007. Hugh Grant, Drew Barrymore (pf.). Adam Schlesinger (comp.).

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