

End of Season Talk
Music in Film
Tuesday May 10th 2005

PLAY OLYMPIC FANFARE (45" MARK)

Ladies and Gentlemen, welcome to this evening's talk on Music in Film. First is there anyone who feels they could put a name to that opening piece of music? Yes, John Williams. When I put together a selection of personal favourites for this evening I realised I had nothing by one of the most feted composers of the last quarter century, so I stuck this in at the beginning. Actually it's a bit of a cheat because it wasn't written for a film, but it is a fanfare so it's kind of appropriate as an opener and it bears many hallmarks of a Williams film score: at least one good tune, rumpeting horns, flamboyant percussion and, well, it's loud. It's also appropriate because Williams is the figure who provides a link with the beginnings of Hollywood film music, which is where I'm going to start. For want of a better word he works in the same romantic idiom – full symphony orchestra, it's tonal, emotional, and tuneful, and, yes, just a little brash. I say Hollywood film music not to say there isn't any elsewhere, and indeed I shall be playing some this evening, but commissioning a film score, and recording it, is an added expense that world cinema productions often avoid, and we tend to dissociate such films in our minds from the kind of cinema where there is something going on in the background that's trying to manipulate how we feel about what we're viewing. Which is of course one of the functions of film music, and for mainstream Hollywood the only one, but film music can also be ironic and self-aware, as we shall see.

By the way that piece was the Olympic Fanfare, composed for the Los Angeles games in 1984 and conducted by the composer.

The traditional romantic idiom in Hollywood film composition lasted about as long as the studios' Golden Age, i.e. until the mid-fifties, though it got off to a late start. Before the advent of sound as you know the music was not prescribed by a film composer but in the hands of the ingenuity of the theatre musicians. As sound came in there were considerable initial problems concerning mixing, meaning that dialogue and music tracks were both possible but could only be used independently of one another. You may have noticed this even in a relatively late production such as our Colonel Blimp a few weeks ago, though how much this was part of Powell and Pressburger's ironic style and how much due to relative British primitivism in matters sound-technical, I don't know. Faced with the prospect of music being confined broadly to title sequences and montages, producers thus opted for library music as source material. Hence if you watch one of those early Universal horror movies you'll get the Scene from Swan Lake, or the theme from Tchaikovsky's Romeo and Juliet Fantasy Overture in some hoary old recording. By the mid-thirties though things were evolving fast and they were evolving into that particular Hollywood idiom born of the silent days: musical wallpaper, you could call it. You only have to watch the opening of a film like Four Daughters (1938); every line of dialogue is adumbrated on the soundtrack by some swoop or sigh of the strings. At about the same time something very fortuitous happened: Hollywood was suddenly awash with a mass of talent fleeing Nazi threatened Europe, among them composers such as Franz Waxman, Dmitri Tiomkin and Miklos Rozsa. Max Steiner had been in America since 1924. Now I have no doubt that Hollywood product of these years would have had this very romantic, schmaltzy sound without their help – the music of Alfred Newman is testimony to that – but it certainly wouldn't have had the flair. Another of these émigré composers was Erich Wolfgang Korngold, who scored many films for Warner

Bros during the 30s and 40s. Among the best loved of these were the period adventures starring Errol Flynn. Here's the main title from *The Sea Hawk*, one of the best with Flora Robson as Queenie, Henry Daniell as a rapier-sharp villain and magnificent art direction. But first, here's some Richard Strauss. (*Don Juan 1,00*) Hold that sound in your head, the sweep of the string theme, the thrill of the brass, and rhythmic spring in the step and – am I mistaken? – sense of humour. Now listen to *The Sea Hawk's* title music, which follows that classic Hollywood template, to be revived by John Williams forty years later when he came to score *Star Wars*. This recording is from a suite reconstructed by George Korngold and Charles Gerhardt in the 1970s, and I'm going to allow the music to run on into the portrait of Flynn's ship *The Albatross* (listen for the solo trumpet call) and the throne room of Elizabeth I in order to allow you to bask a little in remembered bliss. (*Main title 0,00-4,00*) Going back to that musical wallpaper phenomenon I mentioned earlier, just listen to this extract from the duel between Flynn and Daniell. After about fifteen seconds of cut and thrust we have a pause for taunt and countertaunt between the duellists, and you can hear the music pause with them. But it doesn't just pause once, it maintains momentum by seemingly following each inflection of the dialogue, before Daniell takes a swipe, misses, snuffs out a candlestick and we're off again. (*The Sea Hawk 7,35 – 8,05*) This superbly idiomatic score reserves its masterstroke for the sea shanty where, we are supposed to believe, the crew of the ship launch spontaneously into the main theme. (*Sea Hawk 9,15 – 10,45*)

Well I'm not the first to point out that Viennese sound in the work done by the likes of Korngold. But it wasn't the only sound during these years. Another was that of American Bernard Herrmann, who came to the movies with Orson Welles and *Citizen Kane*.

Herrmann's music has a unique colour that sets it apart, full of dark and forboding. It describes emotional responses that inhabit the liminal region between sanity and pathology, which is why he has been a popular choice among directors of thrillers and fantastic cinema. The filmmaker with whom he formed the most sustained working relationship was Alfred Hitchcock, on nine of whose films he worked between *The Trouble with Harry* and *Torn Curtain*, though this last saw their falling out resulting in the replacement of his music with that of John Addison, and on *The Birds* he only worked in an advisory capacity to help devise the avian sound effects. Musically speaking we have the Herrmann chord (*illustration*) comprised of minor and major thirds, the use of suspended brass chords, a very dark tonal palette favouring low woodwind and brass, the use of cells of musical ideas, sometimes in parallel, but repeated without really going anywhere (think of *North by Northwest*) – perfect for conjuring mood. It has been said that if Herrmann had written Beethoven's Fifth it would have sounded like this (*Illustrate first Beethoven, then Herrmann*). Just play the outer notes and you have the typical Herrmann refrain, actually used in Brian De Palma's *Sisters*. (*Slide*)

The film on which Hitch and Bernie really met eye to eye, or should I say eye to ear, was *Vertigo*. Herrmann's score contains a number of characteristic elements. First we have that chord, which conveys the mixture of anxiety and dread to be found both in the Stewart character's fear of heights, and our fear of where his necrophiliac pursuit might take him and what it might imply about us. We have those brass suspensions. Then the intrigue theme, for want of a better term, rising and descending arpeggios with minor second shifts, sometimes heard at double the speed (*illustration*). Finally Herrmann loves to use sections of the orchestra in blocks, cutting back and forth in a

rather cinematic way, though the device is removed from any corresponding visual figuration. In the title music, where we can see all these elements coming together, he contrasts the harp or celeste playing the intrigue theme with portentous brass chords. Listen also to how during the two sections where the strings take over the intrigue theme, breaking away from this antiphonal arrangement, so to speak, and turn the material into something more lyrical, the first time they are punctuated by simple brass chords, the second time by a descending sequence of notes on trumpets and horns. *(Film clip 0,22-3,22)* For the attacks of vertigo Herrmann just uses more of those chords with harp glissandi over the top. The only actual tune in the score, an unusual thing in itself in Herrmann's music, is the love theme which it is commonly said derives from Wagner's Prelude and Liebestod from Tristan and Isolde. I think that's more a way into his generally unresolved tonal world than anything. Both themes contain this use of suspension. *(Illustration)* Hang on. You remember that descending sequence we just heard over the opening credits *(illustration)*. The clip I'm going to show is actually a much more low-key affair but illustrates how superbly Herrmann's music can maintain tension without the director having to do anything much at all. However, this being Hitchcock he is doing quite a lot. It's when Scottie follows Madeleine to the art gallery, where she has her own dead-person-fixation, on her supposed Hispanic ancestor, Carlotta Valdes, pictured in a portrait in the gallery. Herrmann employs a simple musical idea that he first tried out in *The Man Who Knew Too Much* *(Illustration)*. Here he adds a Habañera rhythm to provide the appropriate exotic allusion, actually just a harp string. *(Illustration)*. *(FILM CLIP: A Portrait of Carlotta-25,22)*

I mentioned earlier Herrmann's falling out with Hitch during the making of Torn Curtain. Hitchcock by this time had decided that Herrmann's music had grown too

big for its boots and was, shall we say, imposing his personality onto to the finished product to the detriment of Hitch's. As a result of this decision some of the film shot had been cued by Herrmann but goes unaccompanied in the released version. I am fortunate to be able to show you a clip both with and without music and let you judge which you think is better. It's a murder scene the idea behind which was that Hitch wanted to show how messy and unstraightforward it is to kill a man: we don't die easy. (FILM CLIP) I don't know about you but, much as I love Herrmann's music there, I think Hitchcock's purpose is better served by the absence of a music track.

By the 1950s the lush 1890s sound of the classic Hollywood composers was being replaced by a more modern sound, a music which took account of the developments made in the intervening years, and specifically American music – ragtime, jazz, and the works of Aaron Copland. Alex North, Elmer Bernstein and Leonard Rosenman, who scored the James Dean films *Rebel* and *East of Eden*, were all writing a leaner, more angular, more up to date sound which suited the contemporary subjects that were being tackled. One figure who bestrode serious and popular genres was Leonard Bernstein (*Slide*) but so bitter was his experience of writing for the screen that *On the Waterfront* was the only film he ever scored. It does, however, typify the leap forward in style of which I have been speaking. The music is in a sense *too* good and, as with *Torn Curtain*, the producers felt it was overshadowing the film and cut a lot of it. Even now you can sort of see what they meant, and it raises all those questions about whether film music should make itself felt, whether good music and good film music are in fact different entities.

Bernstein's main idea is the opening horn solo (*Illustration*). This is a great theme; it is at once noble and melancholy, speaking perhaps of the longshoreman's difficult

life, or of the heroic gesture that Terry Molloy will eventually make in their name. These notes generate much of the material in the score. There's also a streetwise saxophone theme. (*Illustration*) Finally, there's the love theme which, in a wonderful marriage of form and intent grows organically from three notes to a ravishing climax, all the time avoiding sickly sweetness in favour of an austerity in keeping with the film's setting and the problematic nature of Edie and Terry's love. (*Illustration CD 1,00-2,00*) Here is the first scene between the couple and it's a tense one. Terry has just chased off a tramp who has reminded him that he was there the night of Joey – Edie's brother's – death simultaneously bringing that to the fore of the audience's mind. Thus we are hardly sympathetic from the outset to his courting of Edie. Music is discreetly absent from the first two minutes or so of the scene, and I'm going to play you some of that so you can feel the change when it does come in. Notice also how at this point Bernstein does not bring the theme to full bloom; that would be too much. (*film clip Scene 9, 26,50-29,50*) Bernstein's tour de force is reserved for the film's close, when Terry Molloy turns defeat into victory. Beaten by Friendly's men, he must run the gauntlet of the other men waiting to work before the doors can be opened to the warehouses, in what must rank as one of the most potent visual metaphors ever committed to film, describing as it does his character's arc over the course of the whole narrative: exclusion – limbo – inclusion. Here Bernstein combines the noble horn theme, heard on vibraphone, then in full orchestra, with the love theme high up on the trumpet. (*Clip: Scene 28; 1"39'45-end*)

We're going to leave America for a moment now and travel to Europe and the music of Nino Rota. Now everyone knows The Godfather theme and that he had a career-long partnership with Federico Fellini (*Amarcord* we saw only the other week), but

Rota also worked on scores of other films (peplums, Visconti's *The Leopard*, all sorts of projects); in fact if I might push my punning tendency further, Nino-rotalotta-nota! We are in fact giving away as the first prize in our quiz a CD of Rota film music, made up of tracks from *The Godfather* and Fellini films. *(Slide)* I've selected one of his best known Fellini scores, *Otto e mezzo*, but one which bears all the hallmarks of his work with Fellini: modest forces, prominence given to solo instruments, a café-band/music hall atmosphere sometimes resembling a full-blown circus sound, at others a melancholy, smoochy, end-of-evening setting. It is this blend of the cheerful and the rueful that makes up the charm of his music, and he is a master tunesmith and illustrator. My clip doesn't contain the really famous circus theme which accompanies the final scene of the film. Instead I'd like to concentrate on a subtler aspect of technique: Rota has to underscore a transition between scenes and moods in the film. This in itself is comparatively rare in films. Music cues may well follow one another without a break (music for one scene reaches a cadence/music for the next signals an abrupt change of pace) but it's not often a composer is asked to shadow the director's intentions as closely as this. The first idea you will hear is a brisk, syncopated theme representing the hurly-burly of life at the spa surrounded by colleagues, acolytes and flames young and old. He then gradually decreases the pace (listen to the bassoons) and transforms the material into the next previously heard idea, a pendulum-like figure that Rota uses for the particularly sombre, or solemn, reveries of Guido, the film's lost director/hero, for example, those involving his mother and father, or the church. *(Film clip:Scene 7, 1''06'25-1''09'25)*

Another composer to come from a jazzy, dance hall background who transformed the idioms of such music to suit his purpose is John Barry. *(Cue Ipcress File theme)*

Unfortunately in my view by the end of the sixties Barry had more or less played himself out and arrived at a plateau of smooth and efficient film composition, unmistakable and elevating many an inferior film but not really rewarding isolated listening. One of my favourite Barry scores is his very first, *Zulu*, but there was enough cut and thrust in my selection already so I settled for *The Ipcress File*. *(Slide)* Coming from a man who had just scored *Goldfinger* and *Thunderball*, this is a magnificent antidote to Bond, as indeed was the film. It's low-key, slightly seedy, and above all fatalistic in the manner of those Cold War thrillers of the sixties (*The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*). And he does this, yes by employing a jazz band aesthetic, augmented by flutes as he often did, but with the smart addition of a cimbalom. Thus the rainwashed streets of London set to the twang of the cimbalom unconsciously echo those of Vienna and the zither of Anton Karas (*Harry Lime* – *Harry Lime*). Perhaps unintended but it adds a cache of respectability to the film. *(Film Clip: Chapter 4; 26,40-28,40)*

Back to America now and Jerry Goldsmith. Goldsmith inherited that lean sound from the music of the fifties. His string writing has that homophonic quality, his muscular rhythms make him an excellent choice for marches and action films. But he is more than a John Williams, second class. For a start, his string sound is totally different, as I've already said. More importantly, he has proved himself remarkably versatile: an Oscar-winning black mass pastiche for *The Omen*, a Latin American sound for *Under Fire*, a dreamily erotic score for *Basic Instinct*. *(Slide)* *Planet of the Apes* shows him at his most experimental and resourceful. In the days before science fiction spelt bombast in space, it afforded film composers the opportunity of doing some pretty modern things musically speaking. We're going to look at the *Manhunt* sequence of

the film in conjunction with an extract from the production score. (*Handouts*) I don't know how adept you all are at score reading, but I'll do my best to give you signposts to find your way. From time to time I might shout out a figure number (*indicate*) or perhaps a musical entry, so if you've got your pens handy feel free to write on these. The first things to notice here are the production markers giving the time lag before this cue and the shot with which it is to begin. Usually, before a film composer sets to work the director views the film with him and goes over all the cues for which he wants music. (It was disagreement over precisely such a question that spelt the end of the Herrmann-Hitchcock partnership.) The composer then writes his music sticking to certain inflexible markers in the screenplay. Goldsmith has chosen to set the music to crotchet = 160, which makes setting up the film for the time lag pretty easy (3 crotchets per second = one second to a bar, so it's a four second delay). A little further on (p.399, bar 52) we have the ram's horn entry which accompanies the first clear revelatory shot we, and the Chuck Heston character, have had of the ape overlords of this planet. Within these parameters the composer, therefore must write something reasonable meaningful. The fact that any of this music bears listening to outside the film is remarkable in itself. (Further discussion of markers in the score.)

(Music track x 2, then Film Clip: Chapter 9)

The year 1968 saw another genre masterpiece, this time of the Western variety, to have a classy score. Often touted as its director's first American western, it was in fact largely shot in Almería, Spain like its predecessors. (*Slide*) Morricone is a giant of film composition. I could do a whole evening of Morricone tracks and guarantee you wouldn't hear the same idea twice, though he did indeed recycle himself at times. He's so identified with his spaghetti western music that I thought about doing something like *The Bird with Crystal Plumage* or *Battle of Algiers*, but this is just one

of my favourite film scores ever. There's none of the whistling, grunting and choral stuff that Morricone used in the Dollars trilogy with Leone, though he does retain and develop the stand-alone feature of his scoring, whereby action pauses for music in an operatic kind of way. A suitable adjective, and one often used of Leone's style of storytelling. Morricone also extends his use of motifs, introduced in *The Good the Bad and the Ugly*, to represent distinct characters. First we have the Man with the Harmonica, played by Bronson (*CD clip*), then the villain Frank (Henry Fonda) (*music*), followed by Jill McBain (Cardinale) (*music 0,50*) and finally by the outlaw Cheyenne (Jason Robards) (*music*). So Wagnerian is Leone's pace by this time that the first hour of the film is spent introducing these four characters. Jill's theme is also associated with the opening up of the west (the native American has no place, and certainly no voice in Leone's westerns). In the scene we're about to see, Cheyenne, Jill and Harmonica all meet for the first time at a staging post. As Cheyenne raises a whisky bottle to his lips, harmonica's refrain is heard and gives him pause. But instead of resorting to dialogue Leone directs everything through the eyes of the actors while Morricone sings the aria, if you like. The aria is not a happy one, for what it tells us is that Harmonica has something to do with Frank; he's carrying baggage. For it is Frank's theme that all but drowns out the harmonica. (*Film clip, scene 4; 36,00-37,30*)

And that's almost it. There is one film of more recent times I would like to include and that's *The Last of the Mohicans*. I know nothing about Trevor Jones but found his theme for Michael Mann's magnificently old-fashioned adaptation quite the most indelible feature of it, and with its memory of course came all those images from the film. The theme is as follows. (*illustration*) It's straightforward enough, romantic, but also speaking to me of the untamed wilderness, and so full of awe and melancholy:

this is a tale that is only too aware of what has been lost, of the fragility of the native Americans and their lands. I'd like to play the opening scene of the film, which is a stag hunt, only we don't know that yet; we only see men running. They could be the hunted for all we know. The music is a scurry of string figurations but over it all the rest of the orchestra picks out and turns over the notes of the main theme, without ever actually stating it. It's the film's uncanny way of getting under your skin, through your ear, ensuring you won't forget it. For me it worked, anyway. (*Clip 1,54-3,?*)

Closing remarks.

(Play