Swiss Film Music: Anthology 1923–2012

Edited by Mathias Spohr on behalf of Fondation SUISA. Zurich: Chronos, 2014 [398 pp. ISBN 978-3-0340-1265-2. £93.00 (paperback in slipcase)]. 171 color photos, with 3 CDs and 1 DVD.

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Switzerland is not typically regarded as a nation with an esteemed and long-standing history of film when compared to other European countries with a similar population and territory. Denmark, for example, boasts an uninterrupted succession of influential film productions from the silent film era to the twenty-first century, from Carl Theodor Dreyer via the Dogma 95 Collective to the recent so-called “Nordic noir” television productions such as *Forbrydelsen* (2007–12, *The Killing*) and *Broen/Bron* (2011–18, *The Bridge*). The low film output in Switzerland can be ascribed to a number of things: a lack of generous state-supported film funding, motion picture tax credits, or lack of the required native distribution market to sustain a vibrant film industry; but a major factor must be the fact that the country is surrounded by such film titans as France, Italy and Germany. The films produced in these three countries have traditionally provided the models, with regard to trends and aesthetics, for a majority of Swiss directors.

Despite the frequent laments regurgitated by Swiss filmmakers, perpetuating the tale of an ailing film industry, it is indeed a welcome surprise to witness the release of the exquisite and comprehensive collection *Swiss Film Music Anthology 1923–2012*. The three CDs, one DVD, and impressive 400-page accompanying book, edited by Mathias Spohr, is produced by the Fondation SUISA, a non-profit branch of SUISA, which is the cooperative society for composers, lyricists, and music publishers, and Swiss representative of work and performance rights. The collection not only offers a detailed overview of the

culturally diverse Swiss film productions over a period of eighty years, but also demonstrates the wide array of compelling film music that has been composed for these films.

It is hardly surprising that the first CD begins with several film music examples by one of the leading members of *Les Six*: the French-Swiss composer Arthur Honegger. The “symphonic movement” *Pacific 231*, which immortalizes in sound an impressive steam locomotive and which is included on CD 1 with a 1963 recording by the Orchestre de la Suisse Romande under the direction of Ernest Ansermet, was originally not conceived as film music, but influenced later filmmakers to create images to the evocative music. Jean Mitry’s 1949 realization with the score conducted by Honegger himself is presumably the most memorable of the several attempts. Honegger’s partnership with Abel Gance ranks among the first close and fruitful collaborations between a director and composer. Two short excerpts from his scores for *La roue* (1923, *The Wheel*) and Gance’s epic masterpiece *Napoléon* (1927) are also included on CD 1.

The 1940s and 1950s were dominated by the film composer Robert Blum. Blum, born in 1900, studied first composition at Zurich Conservatory with the late romantic composer Volkmar Andreae and then with Ferruccio Busoni in Berlin together with co-student Kurt Weill. Blum was hired in 1934 by the largest Swiss film production company at the time, Praesens Film in Zurich, and wrote his first significant score for the propaganda film *Füsilier Wipf* (1938; CD 1),

co-directed by the Austrian theater and film director Leopold Lindtberg, who fled Nazi Germany in 1933, and intended it as a contribution to the “Spiritual National Defense” effort. After the war, Blum composed the music to Lindtberg’s two internationally acclaimed World War II, multilingual films *Die letzte Chance* (1945, *The Last Chance*; CD 1) and *Die vier im Jeep* (1951, *Four in a Jeep*). The latter, of which no excerpt is included in this collection, was awarded the Golden Bear of the Berlin International Film Festival.

The 1950s featured two film genres: the rural, Alpine, historic, costume film and the contemporary, urban comedy. Blum wrote the music to Franz Schnyder’s *Uli der Knecht* (1954, *Uli, the Farmhand*; CD 1), its sequel *Uli der Pächter* (1955, *Uli, the Tenant*), *Die Käseerei in der Vehfreude* (1958, *The Cheese Dairy in the Hamlet*) and *Anne Bäbi Jowäger* (1960; CD 2). These four films are based on the novels of one of the leading representatives of German nineteenth-century realism Jeremias Gotthelf. Blum conceived the scores for these films by integrating Swiss folk music elements—such as *Ländler*—into his symphonic, modernistic, mid-twentieth-century style. These historic, Alpine films, which also include Schnyder’s *Heidi und Peter* (1955; CD 1) and Luigi Comencini’s *Heidi* (1952)—both also scored by Blum—are juxtaposed with a series of urban comedies, all shot in Zurich, such as *Oberstadtgass* (1957, *Upper Town Lane*), *Bäckerei Zürrer* (1957, *Bakery Zürrer*) and *Hinter den Sieben Gleisen* (1959, *Behind Seven Railroad Tracks*). These three films were directed by Kurt Früh with scores by Walter Baumgartner and produced by Praesens Film’s competitor, Gloria Film. Like Blum, Baumgartner studied composition with Andreae at Zurich Conservatory, before founding the jazz ensemble *The Magnolians* in 1934, working in several vaudeville theatres—notably the Corso Theater in Zurich—as composer, arranger, conductor and pianist and beginning writing for the screen in 1944. CD 1 contains the opening credit song ‘In allen Gassen wohnt das Glück’ (“Luck Inhabits All Lanes”), performed by Lys Assia, who was the first winner of the European Song Contest a year before the film’s release. Früh and Baumgartner appear to have been strongly influenced by the opening of René Clair’s *Sous les toits de Paris* (1930, *Under the Roofs of Paris*). As an homage to Clair’s opening of his ground-breaking early sound film—particularly the idea of a long crane shot over the Parisian rooftops—*Oberstadtgass* begins similarly with a long pan shot over the roofs of Zurich’s historic city center. In accordance with Raoul Moretti and René Nazelles’s title *chanson* for

Sous les toits de Paris, Baumgartner keeps Assia’s song in a relatively slow triple meter with a nostalgic mood, celebrating the “little people” of Zurich. The opening credit number for *Hinter den Sieben Gleisen*, which is included on CD 1, is highly original and constitutes presumably one of the only cases in which the credits are not shown as title cards but sung, here by the celebrated Swiss comedian César Keiser to a graceful South American rhythmic accompaniment which imitates train sounds.

The aesthetics of Baumgartner’s inventive scores with decisively popular music characteristics were continued in the 1960s and beyond by the jazz saxophonist Bruno Spoerri, who revolutionized Swiss film music by introducing electronic music elements into his scores. CD 2 includes Spoerri’s compelling score for saxophone quartet and percussionist for the documentary *expo 64 impressions* (1964) directed by Ernst Scheidegger and commissioned by the Expo 64—the Swiss world’s fair held in Lausanne. The DVD contains four 1960s television commercials with Spoerri’s music. All four commercials (one for Araldit glue, two for Riri zippers and one for the Kodak Instamatic camera) are based on *musique concrète*. CD 2 features the opening credit music of Spoerri’s overdubbed jazz fusion score for Rolf Lyssy’s sprightly comedy, *Teddy Bär* (1983, *Teddy Bear*). The same CD also presents a musical excerpt of Lyssy’s earlier satire *Die Schweizermacher* (1978, *The “Swissmakers”*). Jonas C. Haefeli wrote a jazz-rock influenced score with short alphorn interludes alluding to the tongue-in-cheek topic of a police duo investigating the private life of applicants seeking Swiss naturalization. An American jazz saxophonist surprises the two officers by presenting to them a jazz rendition of the Swiss national anthem. Haefeli is also represented on CD 2 with score excerpts from Walter Deuber and Peter Stierlin’s *Videopoly oder Duponts Verschwinden* (1986, *Videopoly or Dupont’s Disappearance*) and *Klassezämekunft* (1988, *Class Reunion*) by the same director duo, which was produced as the first Swiss German Dolby Stereo film.

The avant-garde composer Jacques Guyonnet provided the scores for such French New Wave influenced films as Michel Soutter’s *La lune avec les dents* (1967, *The Moon with Teeth*; CD 2) and Haschich (1967; CD 2) as well as Alain Tanner’s *Charles mort ou vif* (1969, *Charles Dead or Alive*; two tracks on CD 2). CD 2 also includes an excerpt of Arié Dzierlatka’s score based on Schubert’s ‘Fremd bin ich eingegangen’ (“A Stranger I Arrived Here”) of *Winterreise* (*Winter Journey*) for Tanner’s *Messidor* (1979). The third

important director of the New Swiss Cinema of the 1960s and 1970s was Claude Goretta. He is represented on CD 2 with a musical excerpt from his internationally acclaimed *L'invitation* (1973). The music was composed by keyboardist Patrick Moraz, who later became a member of the bands Yes and the Moody Blues.

The classical pianist and long-time music consultant to the Schauspielhaus Zurich, Mario Beretta, wrote the score to Fredi M. Murer's "archaic tragedy" *Höhenfeuer* (1985, *Alpine Fire*; CD 2), which tells the story of an incestuous relationship between siblings in the Swiss Alps. For this internationally successful film Beretta created a score with atmospheric music and found sound objects. Two other excerpts of his music for Murer's *Vollmond* (1997, *Full Moon*) and his *Vitus* (2006) are also represented in the collection on CD 3. *Vitus's* subject is music and tells the story of a highly gifted young pianist who first refuses to become a professional musician. A further important, recent, Swiss film music composer, Niki Reiser, is featured on CD 3 with an excerpt from his scores for Dani Levy's *Alles auf Zucker!* (2005, *Go for Zucker!*)—Reiser is one of Levy's regular collaborators—and for the recent remake of *Heidi* (2001), directed by Markus Imboden. Another promising, more recent, composer, Adrian Frutiger, wrote the music for Michael Steiner's youth adventure story of the 1960s, *Mein Name ist Eugen* (2005, *My Name is Eugen*; CD 3) about four adolescent rascals traveling from Bern to Zurich. He also created a haunting score for the documentary drama *Grounding: Die letzten Tage der Swissair* (2006, *Grounding: The Last Days of Swissair*; CD 3), directed by Steiner and Tobias Fueter and for Steiner's Alpine mountain thriller *Sennentuntschi* (2010, *Curse of the Alps*; CD 3).

Absent from the collection, unfortunately, are a few Swiss film composers and filmmakers who have gained recognition beyond Switzerland, such as Dominik Scherrer, who wrote—among other scores—the music for the BBC television series *Inspector George Gently* (2010–11) and *The Missing* (2014–16) as well as for the supernatural thriller *Requiem* (2018) co-produced by BBC and Netflix. Even though

Jean-Luc Godard collaborated only with non-Swiss composers and into his later films inserted primarily extant music, it would have been desirable to have an example of his intriguing and complex sound and music montages in the collection: for example, from his compelling and engaging experimental eight-part television series *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1988–98), which he produced in its entirety at his studio at the Lake Geneva.

Apart of the meticulously produced three CDs and DVD, the accompanying book is impressive and provides ample information about film music in Switzerland from the silent era to the present day. Eight essays are dedicated to such topics as music in silent film in Switzerland (Bruno Spoerri, Reto Parolari, and Gerrit Waidelich), Arthur Honegger's film music output (Thomas Meyer), Robert Blum as film composer (Anna Katharina Hewer), film and music at the Expo 64 (Felix Aeppli and Bruno Spoerri), and a history of sound design in Swiss cinema (Bettina Spoerri). Eleven short testimonies give voice to the composers themselves, such as Honegger, Blum, Spoerri, Guyonnet, Haefeli, and the only female film composer in the book, Fatima Dunn. A section with nine essays on film music education, institutions, and awards in Switzerland is followed by a detailed description of every track and video on the CDs and DVD with enlightening commentaries by the composers. The collection is supplemented by a regularly updated webpage: <http://swissfilmmusic.ch>.

Michael Baumgartner's research comprises music of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in relation to the other arts. He is the author of the monograph *Exilierte Göttinnen: Frauenstatuen im Bühnenwerk von Kurt Weill, Thea Musgrave und Othmar Schoeck* (Hildesheim: Olms Verlag, 2012). He is currently completing a book on Jean-Luc Godard's use of music in his films (Oxford University Press, forthcoming). He is also co-editing, with Ewelina Boczkowska, a three-volume essay collection on music in European post-war cinema. The first volume, *Music, Collective Memory, Trauma and Nostalgia in European Cinema after the Second World War*, appeared in 2019 published by Routledge.