

# Peter Franklin, *Seeing Through Music: Gender and Modernism in Classical Hollywood Film Scores*

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Peter Franklin's *Seeing Through Music: Gender and Modernism in Classic Hollywood Film Scores* critiques what he sees as the tendency of twentieth- and twenty-first-century feminist film music theory to generalize the music of Classical Hollywood film as a contemporary cultural practice and ignore the historical discourses with which film music of the time contended. Drawing from his career in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century European operatic and symphonic scholarship, Franklin questions the ideas and textual interpretations of several cultural theorists in light of film music's relationship to preceding arguments among elite cultural critics, especially those arguments about late Romanticism and twentieth-century modernism in music. He relies on Andreas Huyssen's notion of the "Great Divide," the ideological rupture in early-twentieth-century Europe between high art and mass culture that was simultaneously played out between modernism and late Romanticism, respectively, and was gendered by contemporary critics as masculine vs. feminine in nature.<sup>1</sup> Franklin's aim in this book is to "chronicle and challenge *ideas* about film music" (emphasis original) with the understanding that "film music is older than film," and therefore that the Classical Hollywood score could not help but respond to and critique the ideas surrounding its formation (2-3). Franklin considers both the influence of Huyssen's Great Divide on film music as well as film music's critique of this discourse.

The book begins with a critique of Heather Laing's *The Gendered Score*.<sup>2</sup> Franklin's introduction specifically targets what he sees as weaknesses in her reading of Max Steiner's score for *Now, Voyager* (1942), using Laing's analysis to demonstrate questionable assumptions musicologists may make if they ignore a composer's unique musical and cultural background. Laing's feminist approach, in Franklin's opinion, forgets the history of classical music in which the Romanticism of the nineteenth century was read as "feminine" against the "masculinity" of first absolute music and then, in the twentieth century, the modernist trend. Lest one believe Franklin is unduly singling out Laing, he takes this approach throughout the book—identifying scholars whose ideas he believes should be reconsidered in light of this Great Divide, reinterpreting their score analyses from this new perspective. Because a substantial portion of feminist film music theory has been penned by women scholars, and because Franklin pulls few punches, readers may feel as though his approach carries sexist undertones—likely unintended, but still troublesome. Despite Franklin's criticism of feminist theory and new musicology in general, his re-reading of Classical Hollywood music through the lens of historical musical discourse has rich implications. His overall argument—that the gendered nature of musical criticism in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries adds important context to our reception of Classical Hollywood scoring—is made

<sup>1</sup> Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism (Theories of Representation and Difference)* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).

<sup>2</sup> Heather Laing, *The Gendered Score: Music in 1940s Melodrama and the Woman's Film* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2007).

throughout the book by critiquing and re-reading key feminist and cultural scholars like Laing, but also Carolyn Abbate, Claudia Gorbman, David Schroeder, Mary Ann Doane, Caryl Flinn, Kathryn Kalinak, Susan McClary, and others.<sup>3</sup>

Chapter 1 of Franklin's book establishes the foundation for his approach by noting the need to analyze film music according to the cultural connotations of not only the scholar's time but also according to the context of the era in which the score was composed and according to even earlier discourses and musical trends to which the score responds. For this argument, Franklin takes Flinn's *Strains of Utopia* as a counterexample, claiming that Flinn mobilizes the idea of Romanticism as utopian and idealizing without regard to its nineteenth-century connotations, and that she ignores the nostalgia that was present in this musical movement from the start. He goes further to discuss the gendered discourses surrounding classical music in the late Romantic era in which programmatic, accessible, and affective works were associated with women, who themselves were equated with "regressive listening" (per Theodor Adorno), commercial culture, escapism, and emotionality.<sup>4</sup> The early-twentieth-century argument that film music was feminine was part of this discourse, and Franklin explores this through the score for *Brief Encounter* (1945), which includes Sergei Rachmaninoff's second piano concerto.

Chapters 2 and 3 round out Part I of the book with a discussion of film music's origins in not only the late Romantic symphony and vaudeville but also in verismo opera and operetta, as the decline of these popular musical forms at the start of the twentieth century led audiences to seek out the multi-reel feature film as a substitute entertainment. Chapter 2 examines this through an analysis of Giacomo Puccini's music for *Tosca* (1900) and of Eric Korngold's reorchestration of Felix Mendelssohn's incidental music for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

(1843) in Max Reinhardt's film version of the work (1935). Chapter 3 then takes the argument further to note that scholars should consider not only the way gender became marked through music but also the way that the discourse of the Great Divide gendered music, and in particular late Romantic operatic and orchestral music. If programmatic music and opera were modernism's feminized "other," then film music assumed this mantle in the twentieth century. In this chapter, Franklin considers both the gendering of film music on a broad level and the local gendering of women in the scoring of Classical Hollywood film by analyzing the musical-sexual politics in Steiner's score for *King Kong* (1933), and Franz Waxman's music for *The Bride of Frankenstein* (1935) and *Rebecca* (1940). He asserts that late Romantic German composers brought their musical language to Hollywood, thus achieving the "climactic phase" of Romanticism through film "as a medium of transgressive pleasure" (81).

Whereas Part I of the book focuses on the musical and cultural foundations of Classical Hollywood scoring, especially in the context of the Great Divide between the "emotional" Romantic approach and the "rational" modernist style in classical music, Part II provides analyses of film music of the 1930s through 1950s in terms of both this philosophical debate and in terms of how film music presented and challenged the gender relationships of the time. Chapter 4 begins this half of the book by investigating how audiences of orchestral symphonies will often "see" (or visually imagine) the music to which they listen—how they imagine unique stories and settings, prompted by the music. Building on the work of Abbate particularly, but also responding to McClary, Lawrence Kramer, Richard Wagner, and Adorno, Franklin insists that even absolute music cannot be purely musical and that audience reception and narrative agency set up the late Romantic era as not only pre-cinematic but also "proto-cinematic" (90).<sup>5</sup> Film, in fact, "appropriates the once-autonomous inner eye" that was once the purview of the audience's own musical imaginings (95). As examples, Franklin analyses Korngold's music for *Anthony Adverse* (1936) and *Kings Row* (1942), as well as Steiner's music for *Gone with the Wind* (1939), focusing on the narratives that arise from the highly symphonic scores themselves. By highlighting the audience's agency in interpreting musical meaning,

3 Carolyn Abbate, *Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991); Claudia Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987); David Schroeder, *Cinema's Illusions, Opera's Allure: The Operatic Impulse in Film* (New York: Continuum, 2002); Mary Ann Doane, *The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film of the 1940s* (London: Macmillan, 1988); Caryl Flinn, *Strains of Utopia: Gender, Nostalgia, and Hollywood Film Music* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992); Kathryn Kalinak, *Settling the Score: Music and the Classical Hollywood Film* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992); Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender and Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

4 Theodor Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: NLB, 1981); Adorno, "On the Fetish-Character in Music and the Regression in Listening", in J.M. Bernstein (ed.), *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture* (London: Routledge, 1991 [1938]).

5 Susan McClary, *Conventional Wisdom: The Content of Musical Form* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); Lawrence Kramer, *Music as Cultural Practice, 1800–1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); Albert Goldman and Evert Sprinchorn, *Wagner on Music and Drama* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1964); Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*.

and by emphasizing the influence of the symphony on orchestral film music, Franklin holds that the early Hollywood score was not only a device for expressing the film's narrative but that it also carried a narrative (both historically and imaginatively) of its own.

Chapter 5 explores Classical Hollywood music as a site that “managed . . . anxieties about gender, identity, and power,” as well as the narratives by which society made sense of such relationships (115). Again responding to Abbate, and building on previous work by Kramer and McClary that has considered music in connection with its “implied Other” (116), Franklin analyses the women (and the men beside them) who are undone by Romanticism's emotionality in film, focusing on Steiner's score to *Casablanca* (1942), Korngold's score to *Deception* (1946), and Waxman's score for *Humoresque* (1946). Chapter 6 turns the modernist assessment of Romanticism (and with it film music) as emotional, feminine, and lesser-than on its head, noting the various ways in which Classical Hollywood scoring itself responded to and critiqued modernist music. Musical modernism (which for Franklin includes “chromaticism, dissonance, atonality, expressionistic disjunction, and electronic instruments” [144]) was in notable instances employed in film scores to indicate a departure from reason and order, to subvert the gendering of film music, and to demonstrate an awareness of past and current musical discourses. In analyzing Miklós Rosza's *Spellbound* (1945), Leith Stevens' *The Wild One* (1953), and Bernard Herrmann's *Citizen Kane* (1941) and *Psycho* (1960), Franklin responds variously to research by Royal S. Brown, Laura Mulvey, Julian Johnson, Dai Griffiths, Fred Steiner, Robert Kolker, Linda Williams, and Philip Brett, among others, highlighting the ways in which film music critiqued musical modernism.<sup>6</sup>

Franklin's monograph is a fascinating and informative read. Pedagogues may find the chapters

in this book especially useful when paired with readings from the many scholars Franklin challenges; assigning one of Franklin's chapters in conjunction with the work of the feminist and cultural theorists to whom he responds would make for a rich academic exercise. But, even on its own, *Seeing Through Music* is a provocative entry that critiques and extends not only feminist film music scholarship but also our understanding of the precursors of the Classical Hollywood score and the impact of Romantic and modernist discourses on this musical genre.

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<sup>6</sup> Royal S. Brown, *Overtones and Undertones: Reading Film Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema,” *Screen* 16, no. 3 (1975): 6-18; Julian Johnson, *Who Needs Classical Music?: Cultural Choice and Musical Value* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Dai Griffiths, “On Grammar Schoolboy Music,” in *Music, Culture, and Society: A Reader*, ed. Derek B. Scott (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 143-45; Fred Steiner, “An Examination of Leith Stevens' Use of Jazz in *The Wild One*,” in *Elmer Bernstein's Film Music Notebook: A Complete Collection of the Quarterly Journal 1974-1978* (Sherman Oaks, CA: The Film Music Society, 2004), 240-49, 280-88; Robert Kolker, “The Man Who Knew More Than Too Much,” in *Alfred Hitchcock's Psycho: A Casebook*, ed. Robert Kolker (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 206-207; Linda Williams, “Discipline and Fun: *Psycho* and Postmodern Cinema,” in *Alfred Hitchcock's Psycho: A Casebook*, ed. Robert Kolker (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 164-204; and Philip Brett, “Musicology and Sexuality: The Example of Edward J. Dent,” in *Queer Episodes in Music and Modern Identity*, ed. Sophie Fuller and Lloyd Whitesell (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 177-90.

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