

Marcia J. Citron. *When Opera Meets Film*

Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010 [xviii, 324p. ISBN 978-0-521895-75-0. €55.00 or \$95.00 (hard cover)] Cambridge Studies in Opera. Music examples, illustrations, tables, epilogue, endnotes, bibliography, filmography, videography, and index.

JAMES L. ZYCHOWICZ

A recent volume in the series Cambridge Studies in Opera, Marcia J. Citron's *When Opera Meets Film* is an exploration of the ways in which artforms interact, as opera may be perceived to shape the content of film. This book differs from the author's earlier study *Opera on Screen* (Yale University Press, 2000) in which Citron focused on opera films, like Franco Zeffirelli's *Otello* (1978), Joseph Losey's *Don Giovanni* (1979), and other traditional presentations of the artform in this medium. In *When Opera Meets Film* Citron is concerned with the synergy between the two genres when they merge in several representative mainstream motion pictures. Presented as a series of case studies grouped around the rubrics of style, subjectivity, and genre, *When Opera Meets Film* offers models for investigating the ways in which the medium of opera intensifies films through the unique qualities it possesses and can imbue other genres. Citron used the term "operaticness" to indicate the ways in which opera infuses film with its unique qualities that then take on cinematic dimensions.

In Citron's study each chapter focuses on a specific film that represents a unique way of using opera in its structure, with varying degrees of operaticness present. In pursuing this tack, Citron makes use of several analytic perspectives, as with her exploration of the operatic visual sense found in Coppola's *Godfather* film trilogy (1972, 1974, and 1990), the intertextual use of opera in films like John Schlesinger's *Sunday, Bloody Sunday* (1971) and Mike Nichols' *Closer* (2004), the use of opera as a

plot device, as found in Norman Jewison's *Moonstruck* (1987), the ways in which opera and music from opera inspire the short films collected in the omnibus motion picture *Aria* (1987, directed by Robert Altman, Bruce Beresford, Bill Bryden, Jean-Luc Goddard, Derek Jarman, Franc Roddam, Nicolas Roeg, Ken Russell, Charles Sturridge, and Julian Temple), and the element of subjectivity in production and costume designer Jean-Pierre Ponnelle's opera films.

The first section treats Coppola's *Godfather* trilogy, for which Nino Rota composed the film score. As Citron points out, the original film and its sequels contain allusions to opera that support various aspects of the work, beyond the overt invocation of Pietro Mascagni's *Cavalleria rusticana* at the end of *Godfather III*. The idiomatic combination of images at the end of the first film recalls the way in which ensemble in opera allow various elements to intersect, like those that occur at strategic points of such Romantic works as *Lucia di Lammermoor* or *Rigoletto*. This stylistic distinction is important in order to understand Citron's comments about musical processes she observes in the conclusion of the first film: "The sequence is also operatic in its overlapping entrances—a kind of dramatic *stretto* in which events and visual cuts follow each other much more quickly than in the rest of the film. It resembles an operatic finale in the coming together of dramatic strands ..." (pp. 24-25). This supports Citron's discussion of the larger gestures and motifs in the *Godfather* trilogy and become a foil for the music,

particular the famous “Love Theme” (p. 39), which has since become a memorable part of twentieth-century popular culture.

Ultimately the overt presence of *Cavalleria rusticana* in the third *Godfather* film stands apart for its direct invocation of opera, which is intensified by the way in which *Godfather* characters are used in depicting that work. As familiar as this opera may be, additional meanings arise when this work is grafted onto the *Godfather* trilogy. Yet the details that Citron brings out, like the line from the opera “Hanno ammazzato compare Turiddu!” (“They’ve killed our neighbor Turiddu!”) in its verbal echoes in the screenplay of *Godfather III*, brings out the cross-fertilization of genres that may be perceived in this example of genre-style operaticness. Beyond that, Citron’s discussion of Coppola’s use of the Intermezzo from *Cavalleria rusticana* calls to mind a large-scale parody of the opera when this instrumental piece shifts out of the main action of the opera as recounted in the film and moved, instead to support the action that comes after it. Does this count as operaticness or has the Intermezzo become background music for the film when taken out of its function in the opera as a means of dividing the two stages of its structure? While Citron holds that Coppola’s manipulation of the piece renders its operatic character irrelevant (p. 55), her subsequent discussion of the aesthetics of instrumental music over vocal (pp. 56-57) seems to intellectualize the expedience of this use of the Intermezzo.

Such use of music from opera for new purposes is not unique to Coppola. The choice of two episodes from the anthology *Aria* shows the difference that exists even within this single project. The “Nessum dorma” setting by Ken Russell is a lavish production that takes its point of inspiration from Puccini and builds on it to fashion a narrative conveying visually the sense of transformation that already takes place at this point in the opera. The analysis in this study reflects Russell’s deft use of this music for the *Aria* project that stands well on its own merits as a kind of music video. With Franc Roddam’s “Liebestod,” the images are more problematic through the ambiguous ending that suggests a kind of world beyond, after the double suicide depicted in the film. An important element that is difficult to convey in this excerpt from Wagner’s *Tristan und Isolde* is the transformation that has taken place within the “Liebestod” itself as the music from the second-act love duet becomes a monologue for Isolde, thus pointing up the idea of *Verklärung* (transfiguration) that Citron mentions in

her study (p. 73), an idea that does not entirely work in Roddam’s short film.

This intriguing discussion almost calls for further explication. It would be useful if Citron could expand upon the implicit intertextuality the opera-sources bring into the film shorts. This becomes in a sense a part of the intermediality that Citron demonstrates in various examples, a large-scale way of shifting the hermeneutic emphasis from one medium to another. Yet it is important not to lose sight of the intertextual meanings that occur when the film reflects the lyrics of arias in new ways, as occurs in both the segments in *Aria* for Puccini’s “Nessum dorma” (see pp. 83-85) and Wagner’s “Liebestod” (pp. 66-71). (While it is possible to find the term intermediality under the letter “i” in the index, other terms are found under letter “f” for the rubric “film-music functions,” where various forms of diegetic (source music) occur, as with nondiegetic (score), metadiegetic, and psychodiegetic, an aspect of the book that could bear improvement.)

Such layers of meaning are evident in *Moonstruck*, which benefits from associations that emerge from the references to Puccini’s *La Bohème*. Citron demonstrate the integration of elements from the opera in the film convincingly (summarized in the table on pp. 184-85), such that the soundtrack of *Moonstruck* deserves attention for the way in which the quotations from the opera reflect a remarkable degree of integration. As much as the quotations serve the narrative of the film, they also set up for the audience the pivotal scene that involves the principal characters attending a performance of *La Bohème*, and thus allow the Puccini work to function within the structure of the film without counterbalancing the screenplay, to allow *Moonstruck* to become overtly an opera-film in the manner of István Szabó’s *Meeting Venus* (1991), or others (see p. 205). Rather, this accomplishment is to allow opera to function effectively within the new work, without being treated as so incidental that it would be possible to substitute excerpts from another opera and thus lose focus or to rely on the opera so strongly that *Moonstruck* would lose its popular appeal. Citron covers this aspect of the film well (see especially pp. 204-11) and in doing so demonstrate the ways in which her rubric of desire is borne out well in this example.

A similar level of intensity is evident in *Sunday, Bloody Sunday*, in which the use of the trio from *Così fan tutte* “Soave sia il vento” emerges as a powerful element in the film, a leitmotif as Citron has it (p. 215), with the effectiveness emerging in the

analysis through the references it brings when the author explores the significance of the ensemble in Mozart's score and its relationship to some of the composer's other operas. The deft hand of director John Schlesinger emerges in this classic film that remains relevant four decades after it was released. Citron raises the question of the amount of repetition that occurs, an element that is important in considering the ways in which elements from opera can become diluted in some films—a related case is the overuse of the arrangement of the opening phrase from Mahler's Adagio (of his Fifth Symphony) in Luigi Visconti's *Death in Venice*, such that the quotation has lost its efficacy in the latter part of that film. Such is not the case with "Soave" in *Sunday, Bloody Sunday* where Citron's analysis of the spare score of the film calls to mind the focused use of music in Peter Shaffer's play *Amadeus* (premiered in 1979), and raises questions about Mike Nichols' use of the "Soave" trio and other excerpts in *Closer* (p. 236). Here the use of music from operas serves *Closer* differently than in some of the other films Citron discusses, with the excerpts becoming a backdrop that does not convey some of the direct meanings that occur elsewhere. Citron's analysis (pp. 242-44) brings this out and with it points up the concept of operaticness that guides her in this study.

Taken as a whole, Citron's *When Opera Meets Film* is an important exploration of a unique phenomenon that exists between the sometimes arbitrary boundaries between opera and film. Since the result is not always the same and the success differs, the analysis found in this study can serve as models for further applications in other films where opera or musical theater plays a role and bears further consideration for the meanings conveyed alongside the screenplay and film score. At times some of the arguments seem unfortunately brief and bear further explication, as with the references to liturgical rite in Coppola's *Godfather*, an element that has large-scale significance because of the role music plays in liturgy. Elsewhere the reference to the specific performances used in the various films Citron discusses bears further consideration for the ways in which these interpretations stand apart through the qualities found in famous voices like Jussi Bjoerling, Enrico Caruso, Leontyne Price, or Reri Grist, and others or well known conductors like Erich Leinsdorf. Would the effect in the films differ with other performances or interpretations? Here it would be useful for a study like this to include with the filmography details about the musical performances used, something that is

missing here. In addition to the bibliography, the filmography and videography included here would benefit from a larger, comprehensive list of other films in which elements from opera play a role, as occurs with the overt use of a recording of the *Tristan und Isolde* Prelude in John Malkovich's *Shadow of the Vampire* (2000) and a similar treatment of the "Libiamo" from Verdi's *La traviata* in Michael Hoffman's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1999), which also demonstrate the intermediality that emerges in the case studies in the present volume.

Even then, further explorations of opera and film merit attention. To turn around the concept of the present volume, it would be useful to explore the influence of film on opera and opera productions. While it may not be the first example of depicting film in opera, the number "Island Magic" in Bernstein's *Trouble in Tahiti* (first performed in 1952) allows the cinematic to emerge in opera. This quality bears attention for various reasons, as it infuses artistic conceptions within opera. While not unknown, the use of film as an interlude in Berg's *Lulu* is certainly a prominent example of this kind of intermediality, but others certainly bear attention, as with Bolcom's opera based on Robert Altman's film *A Wedding*, and major productions that use film, like Lyric Opera of Chicago's recent staging of *Lulu* (during the 2008-2009 season) in which each act was presented as a film reel. At the same time, the case studies in Citron's book offer springboards for pursuing similar references in film scores, an area that would benefit from the thoughtful approach as found in Citron's recent book.

Just as the present study expands the field of opera study to encompass film, those reading this study may wish to revisit the films Citron discusses in this book to capture the perspectives she offers and, perhaps, to go further in perceiving the interaction between opera and film, something that best occurs during the experience of the films. After all, the perceptive reader may find it difficult to apprehend the films without the insights that are found in *When Opera Meets Film*. Yet Citron's perspectives certainly complement and enhance the perception of opera in these and other films that benefit from the influence of both artistic genres.

James L. Zychowicz earned his PhD in musicology from the University of Cincinnati. During his studies, he received a Fulbright Scholarship for research in Vienna. His publications include the monograph *Mahler's Fourth Symphony* in the Studies in Musical Genesis and Structure Series (Oxford University

Press, 2000), as well as articles and reviews in scholarly journals. His recent publications include the article on the songs of Mahler and Strauss in *The Cambridge Companion to the Lied*, edited by James Parsons (Cambridge University Press, 2004), various studies of Mahler's manuscripts and compositional process, including a reassessment of Mahler studies in the March 2011 issue of *Notes*. Zychowicz is a scholar in residence at the Newberry Library, where he has recently given a colloquium on the reception of Mahler's music. He serves on the editorial board of *Oxford Bibliographies: Music* (formerly OBO).