Roger Hickman: *Reel Music: Exploring 100 Years of Film Music*.

New York: W. W. Norton, 2006. [xv, 526 p. ISBN: 0393925749. \$49.70]
Illustrations, bibliography, filmography, discography, index.

LORA MATTHEWS

THE W. W. NORTON AND CO. PRESENTS A ROGER HICKMAN PRODUCTION. Indeed, who would not concur with this banner announcement on the soft cover back jacket?! This is a splendid compendium, a first-rate and extensive treatment of American feature film for musicians and non-musicians alike. It is one of the best companions to film music studies to emerge in the last decade.

This is not merely a college-level text to be understood in one semester or two; it has also, apart from its obvious value to a program of study, something akin to the publisher's authoritative anthologies in its vast approach to the subject. Aside from the breadth of information, he should be resoundingly commended for the ways in which he measures the impact of film music today and its direct role in shaping popular culture. His thesis is, and correctly so, that film has engendered a repertoire that is for North American culture the classical orchestral music of our time. Not only is this borne out by implementation, via the best composers, orchestras and studios, but also the delivery of all styles of music. This also allows us as

aficionados to be brought into a post-modern dialogue, a point to which I shall return below.

As a college or university-level text its pace and clarity as to design and organization helps an instructor to manage course content. Hickman is a music historian and this is a historical survey whose goal is for those who study music or music appreciation to come in contact with how music functions in a given film regardless of the musical style, allowing conventional or typical musical elements such as use of theme (e.g., leitmotiv), harmony, rhythm and texture as well as orchestral colour to guide our emotional and psychological states while we comprehend aspects of the film's narrative (established in chapters 1 to 4). In this way our critical view of music's role in film is changed for the better. It was so comprehensive in including every kind of topic from the dramatic plan (see the chapter on *E.T.*) to film noir and more that it would be difficult to think of material that is missing. It is especially strong in covering composers and diverse information (including the technical, studios) and all trends.

The films under consideration are mainly films with scores rather

than compilations of songs. He explores the role of the composer and the technical means by which a film's music comes to be composed, recorded, mixed and presented. A century's worth of the best American feature films (called "narrative" or fictional by the author) are presented with a view to the artistic qualities and technological advances in a constantly evolving art form. For selected scenes, he undertakes close studies of specific correspondence between film and music; in *The Red Violin* and *Casablanca*, he explores the musical expression almost scene by scene and in places almost phrase by phrase. These scenes are well chosen and demonstrative of close collaboration between director and composer. As a connoisseur of film music, he prizes scores that show great sensitivity to subject and character. In chapters like these, the engaged reader appreciates the artistry of the composer as much as the combined effect of image and music.

The instructor searching for a text to acquaint students also with narrative theory beyond the terms on p. 37 must look elsewhere. He introduces what have become standard concepts *diegetic* and *non-diegetic* and explains how to

tell the difference between them, leaving it to the instructor to pursue that model in discussion if one wished. Some readers may look for a discussion of films outside of America but his choice to limit the subject in this way has advantages in studying studios and production techniques as well as film traditions, chronology and development. An advanced student would no doubt reach for a study of an original score, for examination of compositional process and collaboration after such a study is undertaken.

Hickman's treatment is systematic in that each film is studied as a case using much the same but interesting template, giving students a basic set of skills and a method of understanding components and how scenes work. The chronological order of films

naturally establishes historical groupings characterized by musical style and technology. Once the student arrives at *The Red Violin*, it is the accumulated history and the increasing sophistication of the art itself that has engendered his increased emphasis on analysis and interpretation, as well as on the transparency between composer and director. It also seems likely that Professor Hickman will always have to update the volume frequently and this to our benefit.

Although the following are not treated in a specialist's manner in Hickman's volume, it is from this point a curious student may be lead gently by the instructor or arrive via group discussion to matters of critical enquiry such as audience reception, cultural identity and questions of post-modern aesthetics. We are not

overwhelmed here by the narrative theory model; there are instead even more beneficial consumables: the necessary information, musical and artistic tools as well as film-musical elements to enable students to understand both modernism and post-modernism. In this regard, students with an interdisciplinary interest (most of the population in music appreciation classes, for example) would be given a solid grounding in the history and production of film music, resulting in a full and balanced approach to the study of film music within popular culture. The skills and strengths of a varied group of students to which this book is directed will find this volume of great benefit in a discussion of this collaborative art. After all, *reel music* begins with the score!