

## Steve Lannin and Matthew Caley, eds. *Pop Fiction: The Song in Cinema*

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Music examples, illustrations, index.

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Focusing on the use of popular song in film is not a new trend in film music study, but the study of popular music in film still tends to be overlooked or frowned upon as if it is lowbrow research or a sell-out to appeal to general readers. In *Pop Fiction: The Song in Cinema*, editors Steve Lannin and Matthew Caley explain that they have taken a new approach to analyzing the use of popular song in film that may cause some film music scholars to re-evaluate their approach to its use in film.

Lannin and Caley compiled a diverse array of scholars from art, marketing, business, film, graphic design, literary design, composing, and others to contribute to this volume. Each author was limited to just one song per film, and the film had to date from the last 30 years so as to remain contemporary (p. 13). The editors also restricted the authors from visiting the topic of the musical despite several requests to discuss *Moulin Rouge* (2001). According to Lannin and Caley, “the musical has withered in popularity as the compiled soundtrack has become increasingly popular,” and the use of the popular song as source music in a musical differs from other film genres (p.11). While the song can be used as either source (diegetic) or score (non-diegetic), the musical possesses, according to Lannin and Caley, a “super-diegetic” situation. This is “where the character sings diegetically and an orchestra plays in a state of diegetic ambiguity” (p. 12). For instance, consider the scene in *My Fair Lady* (1964) at the beginning of the musical where Professor Henry Higgins and

Colonel Hugh Pickering are leaving Eliza Doolittle in the street at the church with her basket of flowers. Professor Higgins, in a dismissive manner gives her a handful of coins in order to get Eliza to leave both of the men alone. As she realizes her good fortune, she starts to walk dreamily over to some of the other street vendors. Some of them tease her a bit and ask of her plans as others begin to hum a tune and cease their work. Suddenly, Eliza breaks into the first verse of “Wouldn’t It Be Lovely,” and when she reaches the chorus, the street vendors join in, abandon their work entirely, and escort her around the street to dance and promenade about until the song is finished. It is not until Eliza leaves the street herself that everyone returns to the work they were doing prior to the musical number. It is this kind of “super-diegetic” situation that Lannin and Caley felt was not the overall goal of their collaboration.

*Pop Fiction* contains 12 articles with a variety of approaches befitting the background of the author. Some of the articles are more memorable than others. For instance, film musicologist Robin Stilwell’s “Clean Reading: The Problematics of ‘In the Air Tonight’ in *Risky Business*,” is one of the strongest articles in the collection. Stilwell poses the question of “what happens if the song becomes more popular after the film is released” (p. 151). For instance, Stilwell mentions five instances of the song’s usage outside of the film that could color how the scene from *Risky Business* (1983) could be interpreted today. Phil Collins’s “In the Air Tonight” (originally released

in 1981 on his solo album *Face Value*) became more popular following the release of the film and was used in two separate episodes of the series *Miami Vice*, it was performed at Live Aid, the video was extremely popular on MTV, it was featured in “The Night Belongs to Michelob” beer commercials, and also in the soap opera *Guiding Light* (pp. 150-51). All of these manifestations could play a part in the way an individual may interpret not only the song itself, but the scene it accompanies in *Risky Business* hence leading Stilwell to ask if it is even possible to obtain a “clean reading” of a song. She defines “clean reading” as “[having] less to do with a secure grasp on the reading than it does with the more obvious meaning of a reading free of contamination” (p. 152); it is a way of interpreting a song and the scene that it accompanies. This is certainly a new approach and way of thought when considering the usage of popular song and has potentially opened up many avenues for scholars to ponder in light of their relevant films.

Film and film music scholar Jeff Smith’s “From Bond to Blank” is yet another solid article from this collection. Smith focuses on the Paul McCartney and his band Wings’ song “Live and Let Die” (1973) and its intertextuality by exploring meanings ranging from its associations with the James Bond persona through the mundane aspects of everyday life as it is rendered in a Muzak version in the Ultramart where Martin Blank visits (p. 131). Through his close examination of the use of “Live and Let Die” and the on-screen interaction of the character Blank, Smith demonstrates that there are many different nuances behind the meaning of a scene and its corresponding song. It is this kind of interplay that led Anahid Kassabian to remark in her introduction that “Smith...consider[s] intriguing questions about covers, intertextuality and sound space in a moment of film music that at first hearing is neither complicated nor noteworthy. [His] analysis pointedly suggests that we overlook such songs at deep cost to our understanding” (p. 7).

Sociologist Ian Inglis’s “Music, Masculinity and Membership” demonstrates how the careful placement of Franki Valli’s hit “Can’t Take My Eyes Off of You” (1967) in *The Deer Hunter* (1978) leads to layers of meaning which, in turn, further add elements of unity, duality, and tension. The movie is split into three sections according to Inglis, and in the beginning section of the movie the song is used in a bar scene where a group of guys—Michael, Nick, Stan, and Steven—are celebrating Steven’s impending marriage. In this case they all join in to sing the line “I love you baby” which helps to focus the sense of unity the

group has as well as function as a tension release for some of the developing underlying themes. The sense that there is some unrequited male desire between Michael and Nick and the anxiety of the impending marriage for Steven all seem to be momentarily forgotten by the group’s joint release of the song phrase (pp. 66-67). When this same song returns in the third section of the film, it is again a bar scene, yet the dynamics of the moment have changed. No longer is it the gaiety of the first scene, the celebrations of future life; this time it is in Saigon and surrounded by pain, games of Russian roulette, and the reunion of Michael and Nick. While the element of group unity is still there, the undercurrents of the scene have changed from the initial first scene. No longer are things secure; chaos ensues (p. 68).

While such a close look at the interplay between the song text and the film narrative does provide an intriguing analysis of the use of the song, it does lack some of the elements of the interplay between the music and the film narrative itself could possibly provide. Perhaps those missing elements would further strengthen Inglis’s arguments, or they may suggest an additional interpretation for the dual uses of “Can’t Take My Eyes Off of You.”

Miguel Mera’s “Reap what you Sow” follows a more traditional musicological approach, yet it intertwines with social context, reception theory, and the impact of editing on the audience’s interpretation of Lou Reed’s song “Perfect Day” (originally released in 1972) in *Trainspotting* (1996). Mera also discusses the many possible “extramusical factors that may have been influential in the selection of this song for the overdose scene” (p. 88). As with Stilwell’s work, this method of analysis and perspective will encourage scholars to examine many possible angles of interpretation for a song and its accompanying scene much more carefully than previously.

*Pop Fiction* is a well-conceived collection of articles, most of which are strong contributions to the field of film music research. In some articles, however, the sense of song is less present than in others, making it difficult on a first reading to grasp the author’s intent. Two downsides to the publication are the frequent editing errors (such as a misplaced table in Phil Powrie’s “Blonde Abjection: Spectatorship and the Object Anal Space In-between,” which leads to some confusion when reading) and the editors’ italicized text throughout the body of the text. To date Lannin and Caley have been cited only four times: James Wierzbicki’s *Film Music: A History*, Hans J. Wulff’s *Bibliographie Filmmusik*, Nicolai Jørgenasgaard

Graaljør's "Musical Meaning in TV Commercials: A Case of Cheesy Music," and Nicholas Reyland's "Above and Beyond or Betwixt and Between?"<sup>1</sup> In all of these works *Pop Fiction* is mentioned simply as a recent collaboration about popular song with, at most, a fleeting mention about the work of the authors therein. It remains to be seen if some of the concepts and theories such as Stilwell's "clean reading" approach will be developed further by other scholars in the field.

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<sup>1</sup> See James Wierzbicki, *Film Music: A History* (New York and London: Routledge, 2008); Hans J. Wulff, "Bibliographie Filmmusik," *Kieler Beiträge zur Filmmusik Forschung* (April 2010), <http://www.filmmusik.uni-kiel.de/biblio/Gesamtbibliographie.pdf> (accessed 26 August 2010); Nicolai Jørgansgaard Graakjør, "Musical Meaning in TV Commercials: A Case of Cheesy Music," *Popular Musicology Online* 5 (2006), <http://www.popular-musicology-online.com/issues/05/nicolai-01.html> (accessed 26 August 2010); and Nicholas Reyland, "Above and Beyond or Betwixt and Between?" *Music, Sound, and the Moving Image* 3, no.2 (autumn 2009), 215-35.