

Chapter 9

SONGS, SOUNDTRACKS AND LIBRARY MUSIC

Do songs work in films simply because people recognise them or because they work well irrespective of whether they're remembered or not? Do they work because of the power of association or simply because they sound good with the movie? Usually the power of a song in film is mainly associative, where the context of the original piece cannot be disassociated from its use in film; indeed the main rationale for using songs in film is that they carry with them an original context which is helpful to the movie. The endless debate about whether the use of song in film 'works' tends to generate more heat than light with opponents and proponents equally convinced of their positions. Composer Ernest Bazelon referred to the use of song as 'title song mania'. Years later even the progressive Jerry Goldsmith (the man who said that one day the symphony orchestra would have five sections, not four – the fifth section being electronics and synths etc) referred to songs in film as 'a real pain in the ass.' The title song operates as a kind of leitmotif; in the same way early film scores used themes associative to characters or places, the theme song worked in the same way by identifying the film outside of its film context. 'Pop scores' as they became known, were attractive to the increasing demographic change in cinema audiences. Many pop score composers were already well-established pop writers, such as Burt Bacharach (who wrote the songs and the score to *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*).

The 1950s saw what could be described as the commercially successful use of jazz in film. Concurrent with the jazz developments was the idea of attaching a song to a film. 'Do not forsake me oh my darlin' – from the film *High Noon* was one of the earliest examples. 'Three coins in the fountain' (1954) 'Love is a many splendored thing' (1955) and 'Around the world in 80 days' (1956) were also early examples of successful songs attached to movies. The existence of songs in films inevitably produced hysterically heated responses from traditional score writers: David Raksin said "this business of having rock and pop in everything is absurd." Traditional film composers felt threatened and thought the film score would disappear under a mountain of what they saw as trivial commercialism. Songs were the most serious challenge to the supremacy of the classical score and in many ways overshadowed what might have been a fruitful long-term association with the jazz score. The reaction accorded to songs in film was almost identical to how some later saw the inclusion of electronic music. Composers openly referred to the synthesizer as 'the mockingbird of musical instruments'. But Giorgio Moroder, who wrote the score to *Midnight Express* said, "The synthesizer is an extension of musical history in the same way automobiles were an extension to travel history". Establishment feathers were ruffled when *Midnight Express* was the first electronic score to win an Academy Award.

Movies can and do generate secondary interest in a song, sometimes long after its initial run. The soundtrack to *Wayne's World* was a major success and revived interest in 'Bohemian Rhapsody', spurring sales of Queen's *Greatest Hits* album and bringing the song back into radio-play 15 years after it was first released; the great irony is that the film itself actually pokes fun at Hollywood promotional practices such as the use of product placement. To some extent the use of the songs in film, post 1990, has become cliched, industrialised and institutionalised; the expensive and time-consuming practice of marketing a film has become much easier now you can appropriate the power and success of songs in a reasonably predictable way. Before, you bought records and you saw films. Now you can do both at the same time. But does the close synergy between the song and the movie actually do either of them any long-term favours? Does it dilute or even cheapen their individual worth and merit? Does the moviefication and visualisation of songs through films, MTV and YouTube mean that listeners are viewers and want to 'see' a song in action rather than simply listen to it? And even if it does, is this really the big deal some suggest? Some might say this is no different from listeners wanting to see a band live. The development of the 'organised machinery behind the manufacture of hit songs in films' (Bazelon) is no different to the organised machinery behind the manufacture of orchestral film scores that happened in the 30s and beyond. The use of songs in film came about because of the pressure and impact of sociological, industrial and cultural changes. Whereas some filmmakers were panicked into thinking the only way movies could speak to a younger generation was through the power of song, some movie makers simply used songs because they thought the synergy could be profitable. And it was.

Music and film companies, in order to expand and survive, had a tendency toward diversification and conglomeration. There was an emergence of studio-owned record labels and record company-owned film companies. This diversification and conglomeration was also the result of the ending of insular restrictive practices in the US movie industry. The Supreme Court's 'Paramount decision' (1948) blocked film companies from restrictive practices such as block booking; this created more independent film making but made companies more determined to make money from different income streams, such as synchronisation deals with record companies. Decca records bought Universal Pictures in 1952 – several picture companies became subsidiaries of major corporations which also owned record labels. Synergy beckoned.

The Graduate

The Graduate (1967) was notable not just as a great soundtrack, but also for the fact that it created problems for the specially commissioned film score as an entity. Many people thought the days of orchestral and/or instrumental film scores were over. The popularity of the songs written by Paul Simon meant that suddenly people were thinking in terms of a 'soundtrack' (a collection of songs rather than a score). But the success of the soundtrack to *The Graduate* lay in the fact that it spoke to a specific and transitory type of younger generation who enjoyed folk music and embraced the importance of it in context of protest and the counterculture. 'The Sound of Silence', most famously used in *The Graduate*, was written in February 1964 by Paul Simon in the aftermath of the 1963 assassination of John F. Kennedy. It was originally recorded as an acoustic piece but the record company's producer, Tom Wilson, later overdubbed drums, electric bass and electric guitar, all without the knowledge or participation of Simon & Garfunkel. During the editing stage of *The Graduate* they 'temped' some scenes to *The Sound of Silence* with the intention of substituting original music for the scenes. In the end they realised, or thought, nothing else would work and purchased the sync rights for the song. 'The Sounds of Silence' formed the explicit link between music, alienation and revolution in the film. The song was one of many popular musical hits which were associated with 1960s counterculture. As it was people needn't have worried about the use of songs in film. Directors have used song soundtracks in film and sometimes these are very effective. But the textural sensibilities of the orchestra and the legacy of classical romantic harmony - more recently aided by a creative use of technology and production - still stands as the most powerful musical artistic vehicle for accompaniment of film. Artistically the most effective use of songs in film is when they exist as more than simply a merchandising tool or even leitmotif. If the lyrics, melody and harmony 'speak' for the film and become just as much a part of the narrative as film music this makes the inclusion of the song crucial to the success of the film; thus songs exist 'functionally' as *film music*, not 'music'.

Songs are rarely up to the job of providing an intense, emotional and suitable listening experience to sit alongside the film, unless they are written for the film, which is unusual, or the message and/or emotion of the song happens to fall effortlessly into place, such as 'The Sound of Silence'. Although in the second half of the 1960s there was a brief increased emphasis on unique music for a specific film which encouraged pop music writers to score films, most did not match the success of Paul Simon's music for *The Graduate*. This is because although the Simon and Garfunkel sound was fresh, folky and anti-establishment in flavour, it was used conventionally and functionally within the film. *The Sound of Silence* remained strongly narrative in its use. The 'function' of the music was traditional, if anything reinforcing precisely in the classic style of Hollywood scoring defined by the likes of Steiner and Waxman

A great many of today's film composers are also great producers, embracing technology. They are products of a new generation and are not as suspicious of 'pop music' or songs as older orchestral writers were. Today songs are included in movies but they are rarely dominant. Today heavily produced orchestral commissioned music and song can live side by side. *Robin Hood Prince of Thieves*, *Four Weddings and a Funeral* and *Titanic* are just a few of hundreds of films which are indelibly associated with their songs. In many respects sync deals produce a situation whereby the song is free publicity for the film and the film is free publicity for the song or the artist or band.

Bowling for Columbine

There are, however, a few notable examples where the use of an existing song within a film has produced a much more stunning result than any amount of commissioned music would have. Michael Moore's film *Bowling for Columbine* sought to shine a light on America's culture of violence and guns and the way it specifically affects children. The film was made in the aftermath of the Columbine High School shootings and became a persuasive counterpoint to America's powerful gun lobby and pervasive corporate mentality. At one point in the film Moore interviews an employee of Lockheed Martin, the world's largest weapons manufacturer. Moore was trying and succeeding in making a link between the culture of violence in society and the way in which companies like Lockheed make billions of dollars by arming the world's armies. Moore showed that the preservation and perpetuation of wars was an essential part of the US economy, like, for example, oil. At the end of the interview the film abruptly cuts to a montage of moving and photographic images which display vividly America's role in arming some of the world's most despotic regimes, resulting in the overthrowing of governments America didn't like and the killing of hundreds of thousands of people in the process.

This montage would not have been even half as effective were it not for the strains of Louis Armstrong singing ‘What a wonderful world’. Leaving aside the politics and the rights or wrongs on both sides of the argument, the use of music and the juxtaposition it represented made the sequence unforgettable and iconic, burning it indelibly into the conscience of everyone who watched it.

The Girl in the Café

An arguably much less-watched film and definitely a little less controversial than *Bowling for Columbine* was *The Girl in the Café*, a 2005 made-for-TV film by Richard Curtis. The film tells the story of Lawrence, a civil servant who falls in love with Gina, a young woman whom he meets by chance in a London café. The opening of the film shows Lawrence’s sad but ordered, methodical and regimented life by observing him having breakfast and trudging to work through the rain. The inspired choice of Damien Rice’s track ‘Cold Water’ plays underneath the pictures and provides an excellent juxtaposition of music and picture.

To understand the power of film and the ‘movieisation’ of popular culture we need look no further than the rock band Aerosmith. Their song ‘I don’t want to miss a thing’ was used in the film *Armageddon* and debuted at number one on the Billboard Hot 100 (a first for the band after 28 years together). The song stayed at number one for four weeks from September 5 to September 26 (1998) introducing Aerosmith to a new generation of fans. The song also stayed at #1 for several weeks in several other countries. The song ‘Up where we belong, sung by Jennifer Warnes and Joe Cocker and used in the movie *An Officer and a Gentleman*, captures the ambition of the two main characters in a way which would have been virtually impossible with ‘film music’. Once again the synergy worked its magic; the movie promoted the song and the song promoted the movie.

Goodfellas

Martin Scorsese’s 1990 story of the New York underworld *Goodfellas* shone a light on the Mafia. Scorsese selected a string of pop songs that perfectly evoked the New York mobsters of the time in which the movie was set. There is a strong Italian-American flavour to the music with the inclusion of Tony Bennett’s ‘Rags to Riches’ and Bobby Darin’s ‘Beyond the Sea’. Why do such seemingly happy songs work well with a film which is mainly about such appalling violence and corruption? Perhaps because firstly many of the artists featured on the soundtrack trace their roots back to the immigrant communities of New York City and secondly the songs underpin the startling normality of the violence of the age. Scorsese clearly understands how effective pop songs can be in evoking a particular time, place and culture in the audience’s imagination. The point is that music – in this case, pop songs – manage to distil the age more coherently than most other aspects of the film.

Ferris Bueller’s day off

The 1986 movie *Ferris Bueller’s Day Off* features a selection of songs to great effect. The importance of music within the movie is often overlooked by film historians. One scene in particular comes 56.06 into the movie as Ferris and his two friends visit a museum in Chicago. The wonderfully shot and edited sequence is beautifully supported by an instrumental version of Dream Academy’s cover of The Smiths’ song ‘Please please please let me get what I want’. Moments like this remind us again of the power of music when it is applied to film.

The Spy Who Loved Me

When Marvin Hamlisch composed the score to the movie *The Spy Who Loved Me* he watched every other Bond film to try and find something that hadn’t been done; what he did, perhaps more than any other composer in the franchise, was to utilise current pop stylisation within the main body of the score. Inevitably the one thing that dates most *Bond* films is the inclusion of a song at the beginning and end of the movie. Usually this is written by a songwriter popular at the time, featuring an artist also popular at the time. This gives the movie an injection of current pop culture but can often make the same movie seem out of date thirty years later. What Hamlisch did was strange, because although he embedded the 70s disco-style instrumentation within the film score itself (perhaps most memorably at 00.05.43 when Bond skis down a mountain accompanied by disco rhythms and wah-wah guitar) and thus dated the film, he co-wrote the title song ‘Nobody Does it Better’ which, except for the singer and elements of the production, was curiously timeless.

The Killing Fields

The Killing Fields is a 1984 British drama film, based on the experiences of two journalists and the Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia. The film won eight BAFTA Awards and three Academy Awards and was directed by Roland Joffé. The score was composed by Mike Oldfield and orchestrated by David Bedford. The true story revolves around Sydney Schanberg, a correspondent for the New York Times who covers the invasion of Cambodia with the help of Dith Pran, a local journalist and translator. Schanberg got out of Cambodia when the country fell to the Khmer Rouge, along with most of his fellow Western correspondents, but Pran elected to stay and subsequently disappeared. Schanberg, back home in New York, had given up his friend for dead, when one day four years later word came that Pran was still alive and had made it across the border to a refugee camp.

At the end of the film the two friends are reunited in a deeply emotional scene. As they see each other for the first time in years, the radio plays John Lennon's 'Imagine' (02.09.00). At the start of the second verse, the song comes to the forefront of the movie, sonically. It goes from being diegetic to non-diegetic. The song is clearly appropriate but risked overplaying the scene. What saved it was its contextual move from side-stage to centre-stage midway through the song and the scene.

Trainspotting

The overdose scene in Danny Boyle's *Trainspotting* - his saga of Edinburgh heroin addicts - is all the more effective due to the juxtaposition between it and the accompanying music - the morose tune of Lou Reed's 'Perfect Day'. Character Mark Renton, eager for another 'hit' returns to a desolate apartment, where he shoots up. The film manages to mix the seriousness of the scene with an infectious dark humour. The character providing the drugs says "Would sir care for a starter; some garlic bread, perhaps?" to which Renton replies, "No thank you, I'll proceed directly to the intravenous injection of hard drugs". He takes the drugs and falls into a stupor, which Boyle represents by having him sink into a hole in the carpet, as if into a grave. This is when Lou Reed's flat, monotone and casual voice comes in with 'Just a perfect day'. As the dealer pulls Renton's body on the street to wait for a taxi, Reed reaches the chorus. Dripping with irony and pathos, this is one of cinema's most striking scenes. The use of the song goes beyond simple 'happy song, sad scene'.

SOUNDTRACKS

The film score album is consumed by the audience as part of a much larger experience (e.g. the film) so trying to understand how it is supposed to function separately, as a stand-alone audio experience, can be difficult. The only form in which film music is released independently of the film itself is via the bizarrely and misleadingly titled 'soundtrack' album. The soundtrack is primarily a vehicle for selling the music as a stand-alone product but of course many of the musical cues in the film are not, by definition, designed to work alone. They are often simply not composed with that in mind. Soundtracks often get round this by sometimes selecting edited versions of the score, spiced into musically coherent units which are then given titles which theoretically tie the tracks to different parts of the movie.

Sometimes, but rarely, 'expanded' or 'full' versions of the soundtrack are recorded. These will often be between an hour and two hours long and will feature each cue, step by step. These are extremely interesting for a film score composer or scholar. However, these are a rarity. Some soundtracks may even contain music not heard in the film itself, it may feature cues which are re-written and re-recorded for the soundtrack and the editing for the album may be different to the editing for the music's actual film usage. The choice of track usage will depend on the perceived unilateral musicality of the cues - how good they sound as stand-alone pieces of music. Clearly cues that worked brilliantly in the film may not end up on a soundtrack album because maybe they don't work in a conventional sense as a stand-alone musical experience. When soundtracks first became available they were less commercial ventures and more genuine in their desire to release large portions of the film's music to a discerning audience. Nowadays because of the commercialisation of film scores and soundtracks they can be an integral part of the film's advertising campaign, which means the music has to be accessible to a similar, mainly young audience, along with other spin-offs such as DVD, videogame, action figures, posters, t-shirts, mugs, pencils, etc.

The film itself has to work and be accessible otherwise people will not come to see it. The film is an amalgamation of different art and industry: together it represents an artistic statement and a commercial entity. Let's break down the film experience into its central core components: image, dialogue, special effects, overdubs and music. The only element of a film which is deemed suitable to be released as a separate entity is music. Film companies do not release albums featuring dialogue only or special effects only (“...*track 11: the door-slam in the scene where Gareth ends up shooting John...*”). The idea is absurd because it wouldn't be entertaining. But there's the rub; the only way in which a film score soundtrack would be suitable to everyone and therefore maximise the revenue of the CD is if it was cleansed of its more 'difficult' moments. Nowadays, because of increasing commercial pressures, corporate branding and the power of association, the pressure on film music to work commercially and independently has never been greater. But if all film music was constructed in a way which made it work unilaterally as a 'nice' musical experience then we limit the conceptualisation process and the authenticity of what it is.

The potential dumbing-down of film music

If film score soundtracks are watered down, subject to crass commercialisation simply to satisfy a perceived market, then how long will it be before film scores fall victim to the absolute need for only 'nice tunes'. If this happens it will diminish the music's potential effectiveness in terms of its suitability for film.

When Jerry Goldsmith was interviewed about his seminal score to *Planet of the Apes* he said “You'd never get away with that now.” The score was ground-breaking and it contributed to the film's iconic status. But the music can hardly be described as being an easy listening experience. At dinner parties people rarely say, “Say, why don't we put the soundtrack to the *Planet of the Apes* on?” Goldsmith was right, because a few years after the interview they did indeed remake *Planet of the Apes*. The score was excellent but it was not the disturbingly serial masterpiece Goldsmith had been free to conceive.

A recent trick is to release film music CDs alongside the original dialogue for the relevant scenes. Actors are credited on the soundtrack for their talking roles. In reality this is simply the film minus its image. In effect it is an acknowledgement that the film-score is a difficult element to justify commercially and thus record and exploit, which is something we already knew. What's new is that now it's a problem. Now in order to release film music to the public it sometimes has to a) be nice, and b) have the narrative attached. At 01.46.00 into the movie *Four Weddings and a Funeral* there is a scene where actor Charles (Hugh Grant) is dripping wet talking to Carrie (Angie MacDowell), doing his usual brilliant impression of the classically emotionally constipated Brit in an embarrassing situation. He says “There I was, standing at the church...when I realised that I utterly loved one person...and that wasn't the person standing opposite me.” In the movie this is accompanied by a delicate and unashamedly romantic filmic light string section. On the soundtrack album the same dialogue is there but is accompanied by the excellent Barry White track 'My First, My Last, My Everything'. As a listening experience it's actually fantastic. But it's not an accurate rendition of what's on the film; it's something else entirely. Thus in some circumstances the soundtrack album is an entirely separate entity. It is almost like a different version of the film; the film minus the pictures and with different music.

On the soundtrack album to the movie *Hannibal* there is a track entitled 'Dear Clarise'. Again the producers have kindly and helpfully laced it with the original dialogue from the film in case we are all morons. The dialogue is accurate and authentic; it features Dr Hannibal Lector reading aloud a letter sent to Clarise Starling. In the film she reads the letter over the sound of Hannibal's voice. But on the album there is different music accompanying the sequence. The original music used in the film is just as good but of course it is written for a movie scene which *shows* a character reading a letter with the overdubbed voice of the author reading it aloud. The music is crafted well around these sonic and visual obstacles. The album version doesn't have the burden of the visuals to contend with so it uses an entirely different piece of music; one which might work in a radio dramatization of the film, which is kind of what this track is. There is nothing wrong with this at all; both pieces work well. My point is that trying to pass something off as a soundtrack album when it is in fact a different product is misleading. My further point is that we may be damaging the concept of film music by ensuring that the 'soundtrack version of events' is suitably attractive to listeners and doesn't burden them with anything difficult. The danger is that this practice leaks into the movie itself and directors end up only wanting 'nice' scores. If all these factors force bidding score writers to write accessible music which works as a stand-alone experience in the knowledge that without it the music will not be fit for commercial exploitation, then we should re-evaluate the role of the soundtrack and the negative effect it is having on music. If we are to force film score writers to write music that exists independently as a stand-alone musical experience then we are changing forever the whole approach to film score writing, to its considerable detriment.

If we accept without question that the only way in which film music can be heard is if it's 'nice' we are denying the music's right to exist as art, and subjecting film-score writing to elements of commercial reality it was never designed for. As an example of the power of the soundtrack album and the way it is designed more as merchandise to support the movie, it's worth looking at the 1989 *Batman* movie, directed by Tim Burton with music by Danny Elfman. The 'soundtrack' to *Batman* was a group of songs written by Prince. Prince was hired by the record company to help sell their expensive, high profile movie. Snippets of a couple of songs, barely heard under the dialogue of a few party scenes from the film, is all that existed of Prince's 'score' for the film. Nevertheless the album went platinum and spent five weeks at number 1. Elfman, the composer of the actual score, waited a month before the release of the orchestral score. The record company didn't want to get them mixed up. This prompted *Newsweek* to say 'how to sell a soundtrack: First, ignore the movie'.

LIBRARY MUSIC

Library (or 'Production') music is a convenient solution for film and television producers. They are able to license any piece of music in a company's library at a reasonable rate. By comparison a specially-commissioned work could be more expensive. Licensing a well-known existing piece of popular music could cost thousands of pounds. Production music libraries typically offer a broad range of musical styles and genres, enabling television and film producers and editors to find what they need. The first library music library company was set up by De Wolfe Music in 1927 with the advent of sound in film. Library music is frequently used as theme and/or background music in radio, film and television. Some of the most well-known and instantly recognisable music in the British television music canon were library pieces. Library music composers and session performers are largely anonymous and rarely known outside their professional circle. Composers such as Alan Hawkshaw, John Cameron, Johnny Pearson and Keith Mansfield have become iconic figures within the industry because of the popularity, appeal and longevity of their memorable themes.

In context of this chapter, in which we have also discussed song in film, it's interesting to note that in many ways library music could reasonably be compared to song in the way it functions; unless written specifically for a film, songs have a unique internal emotional dynamic which is created by the composer and the performers when the song is written and played. When the song is played with the film, it is a mixture of the existing emotional dynamic of the song fusing with the film which makes it work. Either we get a juxtaposition where there is an ironic dynamic created by the difference between the two, or, more often than not, we get a supposedly perfect fit, where the message of the song matches or compliments the scene in a film. The point is, because the song is usually not written to the film, if it fits the scene, it probably overstates it and exaggerates it. The fact that the song's content matches the pictures can sometimes lead to overload. The music, in its new context, can sound caricatured. Library music is by definition caricatured; it can't be anything else. It is written by composers who are deliberately adopting a specific style. But because they lack the actual pictures, what they write has to communicate in quite a heavy-handed stylistic way. If a library company wants 'action' music, the music is going to have to communicate aurally as action music; whereas if the composer was sculpturing the music to picture, they would be able to respond more subtly to the images and the narrative. Library music must aurally mimic, impersonate and imitate a specific emotion, whereas if the composer was writing to picture, it would be a combination of film and music which creates the action; it would be an interaction, a reaction, a marriage between what people see and what people hear that creates 'action'.

Roughly 70-80% of music on television is Library music, which is why often the music is utterly duplicative and often quite unsubtle. Library music has to make a unilateral musical statement, it has to have an opinion; it has to be self-contained, because it doesn't know where it is. It must italicise, emphasise and exaggerate. The risk with the overuse of Library music within film and TV is that it creates caricatured results; it is often too obvious and lacks the subtlety and sensitivity that would come with a proper relationship between music and picture; i.e. one which has been created by composers and directors rather than shoved together in an edit room. It fundamentally alters and almost deskills the composer, making him/her into someone who writes self-contained caricatured, off-the-shelf music which communicates unilaterally and instantly, rather than someone who responds to an idea, a story, a narrative, a film - with thought, intellect, conceptualisation and then music.