MUSIC-DRIVEN NARRATIVE FILM:

VOCAL MUSIC AND CINEMATIC STORYTELLING

by

Jesse Newby

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Honors Bachelors of Arts in Music with Distinction.

Spring 2014

© 2014 Jesse Newby
All Rights Reserved

MUSIC-DRIVEN NARRATIVE FILM:

VOCAL MUSIC AND CINEMATIC STORYTELLING

by

Jesse Newby

Approved: _____

Philip Gentry, Ph.D.
Professor in charge of thesis on behalf of the Advisory Committee

Approved: _____

Maria Purciello, Ph.D.
Committee member from the Department of Music

Approved: _____

Laura Eisenman, Ph.D.
Committee member from the Board of Senior Thesis Readers

Approved: _____

Michael Arnold, Ph.D.
Director, University Honors Program

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This research would not have been possible without the support of the following organizations: The University of Delaware, the University of Delaware Department of Music, the University of Delaware Undergraduate Research Program, and the University of Delaware Honors Program. I would like to acknowledge the generous financial support I received through the University of Delaware Summer Scholars Program, the Donald W Harward Fellows Award, and the Undergraduate Research Supply and Expense Grant. I would also like to thank the following institutions for use of their collections and the assistance offered by their staffs: Morris Library at the University of Delaware, the University of Delaware Library Film and Video Collection, the University of Delaware Interlibrary Loan Office, The Library of Congress Motion Picture, Broadcasting, and Recorded Sound Division, and the New York Public Library Jerome Robbins Dance Division. I would especially like to thank my advisors for their invaluable help and guidance throughout the course of this research.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT v
INTRODUCTION 1
PART 1 : THEORETICAL ISSUES AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORKS 7

1 Sound, Image, & Narrative 8

2 Diegetic versus Meta-Diegetic 11

Singing as a Diegetic Element 15
Singing as a Meta-Diegetic Element 19

3 Verisimilitude and the 'Buy-In' Factor 27

PART 2 : GENRES OF MUSIC-DRIVEN NARRATIVE FILM 36

4 Motion Picture Opera 37

Opera and Early Hollywood Cinema 38
Motion Picture Opera in Practice 42

5 Television Opera 46

What is Television Opera? 49
Parallels with Motion Picture Opera 53
Strengths of Television Opera and Chotzinoff's Ideal 58
Stage Affinity and Other Issues 69

6 Film Opera Adaptations 75

7 Movie Musicals and Rock Operas 79

Movie Musicals 79
Rock Opera Films 83

CONCLUSIONS 86
REFERENCES 90
FILMS CITED 94

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the relationship between vocal music and cinematic storytelling, focusing on the following question: how should music-driven narrative films, which are built primarily around vocal music, be constructed and produced in order to be idiomatic to filmic mediums?

In order to answer this we first need a way to talk about the relationship between vocal music and storytelling in film. To this end, the first half of this thesis demonstrates two theoretical frameworks. In chapter one, a "three core-aspects" analysis provides a tool for describing the overall relationship between sound, image and narrative throughout a given film. In chapters two and three, an analysis of "meta-diegetic music" provides a way to specifically identify and discuss the kinds of music around which music driven narrative films are built, as well as the unique treatment and functions of this music.

This thesis also provides a brief overview of the most significant genres of music-driven narrative film: motion picture opera, television opera, film opera adaptations, and movie musicals. Studying these genres reveals a variety of issues related to the combination of vocal music and storytelling in filmic mediums. Analyzing how these issues were addressed historically in the genres listed above yields insight into how vocal music and storytelling could be more effectively combined in filmic mediums.

INTRODUCTION

Ever since Al Jolson shouted out his famous "You Ain't Heard Nothin' Yet!" in *The Jazz Singer* (1927), vocal music has played a prominent and frequently problematic role in narrative cinema. The conventions of traditional Hollywood-style narrative film attempt to create an impression of literal reality. When casually viewing these films, audience members want to believe that they are witnessing the real lives of real people in real time and that their presence has no part in construction the narrative. As Laura Mulvey argues in her famous essay, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," the gaze of the viewer is subordinated to gazes between characters within the film in order to create a believable diegesis and to prevent a "distancing awareness" in the audience.[1]

Traditional Hollywood-style narrative films self-consciously disguise the influence of the audience in order to enhance verisimilitude — in other words, to create an impression of reality within the diegesis or the world of the film. In her book, *Unheard Melodies*, Claudia Gorbman demonstrates that non-diegetic film scoring has persisted into the sound film era as a prominent filmic convention in part because of its ability to "remove barriers to belief" and its ability to prevent the

---

[1] Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, ed. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 843.

spectator from registering the "technical basis of filmic articulation."[2] In this way, non-diegetic music traditionally works to prevent distancing awareness in the audience and to enhance the verisimilitude of the diegesis.

However, vocal music can often have the opposite effect. Depending on the presentation, diegetic vocal musical numbers in film may seem contrived and may demand a greater suspension of disbelief from the audience, especially if the actors are, as Barry Grant observes, clearly "performing for an audience 'beyond' the diegetic one," which is a standard practice in movie musicals.[3] Moreover, there is a common variety of vocal music in film that is neither wholly diegetic nor non-diegetic. As chapter two of this thesis will explain, the nature of this meta-diegetic music implicitly acknowledges the presence of the audience. Therefore, meta-diegetic music runs a greater risk of creating a distancing awareness in the audience and may encounter significant obstacles towards achieving the kind of verisimilitude that is the norm in the Hollywood film tradition.

To better understand the problematic nature of vocal music in film, this thesis explores the relationship between vocal music and cinematic storytelling. This thesis focuses on the following question: how should music-driven narrative films, which are built primarily around vocal music, be constructed and produced in order to be idiomatic to filmic mediums?

---

[2] Claudia Gorbam, *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (Bloominton: Indiana University Press, 1987) 53-69.

[3] Barry Keith Grant, *The Hollywood Film Musical* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 3.

There are two significant limitations to the scope of this thesis: Firstly, the dramatic viability of music-driven narratives and the effective combination of music, storytelling, and dramatic action have played a major role in the history and theory of other areas of study, such as stage opera. This is evident in the work of scholars such as Carolyn Abbate, Roger Parker, Arthur Groos, and others.[4] For example, in the introduction to *Analyzing Opera,* Abbate and Parker identify opera as complex genre that must be analyzed in the context of all its components, not limited to the purely musical.[5] In order to account for this complex and interdisciplinary structure, Abbate and Parker call for an approach to analysis that gives greater consideration to the poetic and dramatic elements of opera, raising them to the a level of importance closer to that already afforded to music. As Abbate and Parker explain, "if analysis deals with musical substance, then analysis of opera should confront nonmusical elements that may inform that substance."[6]

Addressing related issues but with a somewhat different approach, in the introduction to *Reading Opera* Arthur Groos argues, without contesting the primacy of music in opera scholarship, that the narrative and poetic elements of opera drawn from the libretti are also of significant interest.[7] Although much of Groos' essay is devoted

---

[4] The importance of narrative to opera is crucial aspect of any analysis of stage operatic works, and was perhaps most fully introduced to opera analysis by scholars such as Abbate, Parker, and Groos.

[5] Carolyn Abbate and Roger Parker, eds., "Introduction: On Analyzing Opera," in *Analyzing Opera: Verdi and Wagner* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 3.

[6] Ibid, 5.

[7] Arthur Groos, "Introduction," in *Reading Opera*, ed. Arthur Groos and Roger Parker (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988), 1.

to a historical survey of changing attitudes towards opera libretti across time, his discussion of treating libretti with the same consideration afforded to literature calls for scholars to treat the poetic and dramatic elements of opera with due consideration alongside music.[8]

Similar considerations of the analysis of both musical and non-musical aspects play a crucial role in the theories presented in this thesis, especially the three core-aspect framework. However, although dramatic storytelling and performance are an important part of both screen and stage traditions, filmic and stage mediums are fundamentally different and are associated with different conventions and expectations. For example, Parker and Abbate's analysis of *Le Million* (1931) demonstrates that a contextual shift drastically alters the interpretation of this film:

> As soon as they do anything remotely musical they are magically accompanied by the Invisible Orchestra from Nowhere. Considered as opera, this surreal state where everyday life is sung, is familiar and unsurprising. In the context of early sound cinema — usually a more realistic affair — the film constitutes an elaborate, avant-garde piece of absurdity.[9]

These different interpretations can be accounted for in part by the different standards of verisimilitude in film and stage. Verisimilitude is defined as "the appearance of being true or real."[10] It is important to note that verisimilitude is not based on a literal depiction of reality, but instead is based on creating the impression of reality. Thus, in

---

[8] Ibid, 10.

[9] Carolyn Abbate and Roger Parker, *A History of Opera* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2012) 495.

[10] *New Oxford American Dictionary.* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

filmic and stage mediums there are different expectations for what is acceptably realistic, which may cause the same types of actions to be verisimilar in one medium but not the other. In order to account for these differences in medium and expectations, music-driven narrative films require a different approach to analysis than music driven narrative works created for the stage.

Therefore, the discussions and analyses provided in this thesis are limited to the context of filmic mediums and the effective portrayal of music-driven narratives on screen. Moreover, the theoretical frameworks demonstrated in the first half of this thesis grow out of existing scholarship in the fields of film theory and film-sound theory, especially the works of Rick Altman and Claudia Gorbman. These frameworks are only intended for analysis of music-driven narrative films and are not applicable to works created for the stage.

Secondly, the concept of verisimilitude and how effective a film is in creating a believable diegesis is highly dependent on culture and context. The analyses provided in this thesis interpret effectiveness in the context of traditional Hollywood-style narrative films in the United States and Great Britain. Needless to say, in more avant-garde film traditions, as well as film traditions elsewhere in the world, the question of verisimilitude is very different and expectations of a realistic diegesis may be less important. This thesis is based on the conventions and audience expectations that have built up around Hollywood and closely related filmmaking traditions, as well as the work of scholars who have dealt with these traditions.

In order to answer the focal question of this thesis, we first need a way to talk about the relationship between vocal music and storytelling in film. To this end, the first half of this thesis demonstrates two theoretical frameworks. In chapter one, a

"three core-aspects" analysis provides a tool for describing the overall relationship between sound, image and narrative throughout a given film. In chapters two and three, an analysis of "meta-diegetic music" provides a way to specifically identify and discuss the kinds of music around which music driven narrative films are built, as well as the unique treatment and functions of this music.

This thesis also provides a brief overview of the most significant genres of music-driven narrative film: motion picture opera, television opera, film opera adaptations, and movie musicals. Studying these genres reveals a variety of issues related to the combination of vocal music and storytelling in filmic mediums, such as the need for originally composed works for filmic mediums. Analyzing how these issues were addressed historically in the genres listed above yields insight into how vocal music and storytelling could be more effectively combined in filmic mediums.

PART 1 : THEORETICAL ISSUES AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORKS

How should music-driven narrative films, which are built primarily around vocal music, be constructed and produced in order to be idiomatic to filmic mediums? In order to help answer this question, the first half of this thesis demonstrates two theoretical frameworks that provide a way to talk about the relationship between vocal music and storytelling in film. In chapter one, a "three core-aspects" analysis provides a tool for describing the overall relationship between sound, image and narrative throughout a given film. In chapters two and three, an analysis of "meta-diegetic music" provides a way to specifically identify and discuss the kinds of music around which music driven narrative films are built, as well as the unique treatment and functions of this music.

Chapter 1

Sound, Image, & Narrative

One could argue that a music-driven narrative film is made up of three core-aspects: sound, image, and narrative.[11] Viewed in this light, some genres of music-driven narrative film are defined by the treatment of sound, image, and narrative within the films themselves, in addition to the historical context of the genre. Having identified these three core-aspects, one might hypothesize an ideal treatment that optimizes the balance of sound, image, and narrative throughout an entire film.

Sound, strictly speaking, encompasses all of the aural components of a film. In other words, the sound aspect is made up of the diegetic and non-diegetic soundtracks. This includes dialogue, background noise or Foley, the musical score, voiceover narration, and any diegetic or meta-diegetic singing. When talking about sound, it is also useful to consider technical processes. For example, how and when was the sound recorded relative to the image, and how was the soundtrack mixed or mastered? In the context of music-driven narrative films, any discussion of the sound aspect will usually focus primarily on music. For the purpose of such discussions sound will not necessarily be limited to the aural components, but may also refer to musical numbers

---

[11] In the realm of stage opera, Carolyn Abbate similarly identifies three basic systems that must be interpreted in opera analysis: "The analysis of opera seeks to interpret one or more of opera's three basic systems: its visual, verbal and musical substance." Carolyn Abbate, "Analysis," The *New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, *Grove Music Online*, *Oxford Music Online* (Oxford University Press).

in general. For example, a comparison of sound and image may include a discussion of the balance between musical numbers and narrative pacing.

Image, at the most basic level, is the visual presentation on screen. Discussions of image include topics such mise-en-scène, cinematography, framing, focus, and lighting. It is also useful to consider visual rhythm and other features of editing as part of the image aspect. The apparent physical distance between the characters and the audience is one component of image that has a particularly significant impact on the effectiveness of music driven narrative films.

Narrative, at the most basic level, is the story being presented through the film. In one sense this means the plot and diegetic action. However, one must also consider how the events that make up the story are revealed to the audience. Only a finite amount of the story is presented explicitly through sound and image. Implied events are also part of the narrative aspect. Also, the presentation of the diegetic action may be out or order, or even may be intentionally misleading. Therefore, one must consider the implications of plot and scene breakdown within the scope of narrative.

It is possible to analyze sound, image, and narrative each individually. However, the most significant effects of the three core-aspects come from their interaction.[12] Ideally the three core-aspects should be equally balanced and work together synergistically. Not only should sound, image, and narrative be treated with equal importance throughout the entire film, but also they should enhance each other;

---

[12] This is similar to Abbate's argument that the three basic systems of stage opera should not be studied in isolation: "This purifying gesture seems doomed to fail. Opera analysis will inevitably face the necessity of acknowledging the polyphony between visual, verbal and musical, in an object it seems compelled to unlayer." Ibid.

the optimal success of any one aspect should depend on the presence and treatment of the other two. However, this hypothetical ideal balance is very rarely achieved.

In some cases an unbalanced treatment or shifting balance of the three core-aspects is a defining element of the genre. For example, Rick Altman's definition of the movie musical includes a reversal of "the traditional classical narrative hierarchy of image over sound" at climatic moments of the film, closely associated with an alternation between "sequences stressing realistic movement and sound and those which tie movement and sound to a rhythmic source."[13] Although he uses similar terminology, Altman's definition does not consider sound and image as part of a three-core aspects model. However, the same effect that Altman is responding to could be explained in terms of a shifting balance of sound, image, and narrative. The structure of a typical movie musical oscillates between realistic scenes in which the narrative aspect is stronger than the sound and image aspects, and musical numbers in which the sound and image aspects are stronger than the narrative aspect.

In other genres of music-driven narrative film, the unbalanced treatment of the three core-aspects is more often an unintended consequence of other production factors. The second half of this thesis, especially chapter seven, further demonstrates how the three core-aspects model translates into practice.

---

[13] Rick Altman, *The American Film Musical* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 109-10.

Chapter 2

Diegetic versus Meta-Diegetic

In addition to the three core-aspect framework, thinking in terms of a given sound's apparent source with respect to the *diegesis* can be another excellent way to examine the relationship between vocal music and cinematic storytelling. Two of the most basic categories of sound in film are *diegetic* and *non-diegetic*, although some scholars have proposed subdivisions within these categories based on a given sound's function and relation to the image; also the bi-polar distinction between diegetic and non-diegetic sounds has been challenged by the work of scholars such as Michel Chion.[14] *Diegetic sounds* emanate from a source within the diegesis or, in other words, from within the world of the film. *Non-diegetic sounds*, such as voice-over narration and most film scores, are not produced by a diegetic source; such elements that exist and function outside of the diegesis can also be described as *extradiegetic*.

In her book, *Unheard Melodies*, drawing parallels with earlier applications of diegetic/non-diegetic terminology, Claudia Gorbam proposes the existence of a third category film music: *meta-diegetic music*.[15] In its original context, meta-diegetic refers to a secondary level of narration within the diegesis, such as a story that is told by one

---

[14] Daniel Percheron and Marcia Butzel, "Sound in Cinema and Its Relationship to Image and Diegesis," *Yale French Studies*, no. 60 (1980): 16–23. Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 73–89.

[15] Gorbam, *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music*, 22–23.

of the characters. Claudia Gorbman's third category of film music includes music that is ostensibly non-diegetic but can also be interpreted as meta-diegetic; such music contributes to the development of the story by revealing information that is not explicitly present in the larger diegetic narrative. Gorbman's definitive example reveals meta-diegetic music to be a non-verbal equivalent to voiceover narration of a character's internal monologue. In Gorbman's own words, through the meta-diegetic music a character "'takes over part of the film's narration and we are privileged to read his [the character's] musical thoughts."[16]

Currently missing from this system of analysis is a way to identify the unique kind of vocal and accompanimental music found in music-driven narrative films. Gorbman's concept of meta-diegetic music, which describes a kind of non-diegetic music that has a more active role in the presentation of the narrative and sometimes even has an apparent causal relationship with the diegetic action, is a step in the right direction. However, Gorbman's meta-diegetic music is still merely a reflection of an unseen narrative event within the diegesis. In music-driven narrative films, the music itself can have an actual causal effect within the diegesis.

In order to correct this absence, I propose an appropriation and redefinition of the term *meta-diegetic music*. According to this revised definition, *meta-diegetic music is music in a film that the characters interact with and respond to, but which is not prompted by a diegetic source.*

In order to usefully apply this revised definition, one must determine the scope of meta-diegetic music. Taken at its face value, this definition includes the otherwise

---

[16] Ibid., 23.

non-diegetic accompaniment to musical numbers, sung dialogue, and dancing or other forms of metrically organizing movement. These forms of accompaniment account for the majority of instrumental music found in music-driven narrative films. Most of these categories should be fairly self-explanatory. Sung musical numbers and dance sequences with meta-diegetic accompanimental music can be easily identified in almost any given movie musical. Likewise sung dialogue and/or recitatives with meta-diegetic accompanimental music are present in almost all film and television operas, depending on the era and style in which the score was originally composed. The one category listed above that occurs somewhat infrequently and may not be readily identifiable is metrically-organized movement choreographed to meta-diegetic music. Compared to an official dance sequence, metrically-organized movement tends to be less formally structured, may occur as part of a larger scene without being structurally isolated, and often includes a relatively high degree of action. Famous examples of metrically-organized movement include Gene Kelly's first apartment scene in *An American In Paris* (1951) and the opening street scene from *West Side Story* (1961).

One major exception to defining instrumental accompaniment for singing and dancing as meta-diegetic occurs when the source of this accompaniment can be identified within the diegesis. For example, if a diegetic character is singing along with a phonograph recording, then the accompaniment provided by this recording is not meta-diegetic but instead is diegetic; likewise, if two characters are dancing with one another at a party where there is dance band playing, then the music provided by this band is diegetic. Generally speaking, the accompanimental music for singing and dancing in music-driven narrative films is most frequently diegetic instead of meta-diegetic either when the narrative dictates that one or more diegetic characters are

performing for one or more other diegetic characters or during scenes that are narratively identified as a ball or other social gathering typically associated with dancing. Of course, one could point individual examples, such as "Dancing in the Dark" from *The Band Wagon* (1951) and "Think of Me" from *The Phantom of the Opera* (2004), in which the characters' actions and representations on screen complicate this simple divide between diegetic and meta-diegetic music. However, such scenes exist in a gray area, complete examples of which are relatively infrequent. Moreover, these kinds of scenes most often feature a prominent transition from strictly diegetic music to meta-diegetic music.

Sometimes a song or dance sequence will begin as strictly diegetic, but then will shift into realm of meta-diegetic. This happens when the diegetic instrumental accompaniment is either augmented or replaced, usually by a richer orchestration and larger instrumentation. In "Dancing in the Dark," a shift from the diegetic dance band to full orchestral meta-diegetic music occurs as Fred Astaire and Cyd Charisse leave the main dance floor and enter a more secluded area; this shift provides a musical transition into Astaire and Charisse's Central Park ballet sequence. The use of this kind of shift from diegetic to meta-diegetic music can also be found in more tradition narrative film genres. For example, in *Pride and Prejudice* (2005) the second dance sequence from the Netherfield Ball includes a shift from a diegetic chamber orchestra to full orchestral meta-diegetic music. This musical transition accents the growing relationship between Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy.

Up until this point, I have only talked about meta-diegetic instrumental music. However, this leaves open the question of how to classify the characters' interactions with this music, namely their singing and dancing. As a result of close association

with meta-diegetic instrumental accompaniment, one could argue that the singing and dancing should also be classified as meta-diegetic. On the other hand, one could argue that these are actions taken by diegetic characters and therefore should be classified as diegetic. Ultimately we must read singing and dancing as meta-diegetic elements because they function and are treated differently from other diegetic actions. However, for the sake of argument, the next section will analyze what happens if one attempts to uniformly classify singing and dancing as diegetic.

Singing as a Diegetic Element

Traditionally, narrative films attempt to create an illusion that the actions presented on screen are the real lives of the characters, witnessed by the audience, which take place in a real space and in real time. This illusion of reality within the diegesis is a culturally reinforced expectation, supported by the techniques of classical Hollywood style film editing. In order to satisfy this expectation of diegetic reality, one must treat singing and dance on the part of diegetic characters as diegetic actions, even when such actions otherwise would seem unrealistic. However, this creates a built in contradiction; the audience is prompted to ignore the unrealistic use of song and dance based on an expectation of apparent reality.

One way to rectify this contradiction would be to treat the rules governing the diegesis of music-driven narrative films as more akin to fantasy than to realistic fiction. In this alternate fantasy diegesis it would be natural for otherwise normal people to spontaneously break out into highly organized song and dance. To support these spontaneous song and dance sequences, it might also be natural for music to emanate from nowhere. Thus, in such a fantasy diegesis, the kinds of meta-diegetic instrumental accompaniment discussed in the previous section would also be diegetic.

From a scholarly perspective, it is not entirely unjustifiable to read these films as having such an unrealistic diegesis. In his article "Diegesis and Representation," which attempts to better define the term *diegesis*, Remigius Bunia asserts that "what happens in a fictional world need not be congruent with what is known about the real world," provided that, hypothetically speaking, "nothing [in the fictional world] can fundamentally resist description."[17] According to these requirements, a fantasy diegesis that permits spontaneous instances of highly organized song and dance is allowable since the existence of these unrealistic elements within the fantasy diegesis can be described, as it was in the previous paragraph. However, Bunia's discussion of fictional worlds, building on the works of Kendall Walton and Marie-Laure Ryan, also talks about a phenomenon referred to as the *reality principle*:

> The world about which a fictional discourse informs the recipient is identical to the real world "so long as nothing . . . indicates otherwise" (Walton 1990:145). If something *does* indicate otherwise, the fictional world has to be constructed so that it resembles the real world as much as possible, according to "the principle of minimal departure" (Ryan 1980).[18]

The reality principle explains how an audience interprets a fictional world that operates differently from the real world. However, Bunia's description of the reality principle also indicates how audiences expect the fantasy elements of a fictional world to be presented. When the rules governing the world of the diegesis deviate from the rules governing actual reality, these deviations are expected to be minimal and must be clearly presented and explained within the narrative. In this light, the instances of

---

[17] Remigius Bunia, "Diegesis and Representation: Beyond the Fictional World, on the Margins of Story and Narrative," *Poetics Today* 31/4 (Winter 2010): 696–697.

[18] Ibid., 699.

spontaneous singing, dancing, and accompanimental music in music-driven narrative films are problematic because they evoke a significant departure from our reality that is not satisfactorily explained and frequently is not even acknowledged by the characters within the diegesis. Moreover, the majority of music-driven narrative films ostensibly are set in the "real world" and give no expositional pretext for the existence of such fantasy-diegetic music. Traditionally in these films, music is not treated as a fantasy element but rather as a catalyst for narrative and character development, for entertainment, and to emotionally engage the audience.

Given that music-driven narrative films traditionally do not acknowledge or engage with music as a fantastic element within a self-identified fantasy diegesis, there are a number of more specific problems that arise when we attempt to define music as a fantastic diegetic element. For example, suppose there is a scene in which multiple characters sing a duet or ensemble number but, at the conclusion of the musical number, each character remains unaware of any information presented vocally by the other participants during the song. In general terms, this could be described as a situation in which the characters interact with the music but not with each other. Sometimes in film this issue is partially resolved by presenting singing as a voiceover of the characters' internal thoughts or by placing the individual characters in different geographical locations. Although such solutions alleviate the problem of the characters not hearing each other, they still do not account for the characters' apparent lack of awareness of any information present in the accompaniment. Not only are characters oblivious to any musical indications of the content of other characters' portions of the duet or ensemble, but also the characters are apparently oblivious to any musical structures that indicate the participation of other singers.

When certain musical numbers in film are analyzed as diegetic, problems also arise regarding the fluid treatment of time and space. For example, in film it is possible to intercut between locations or events that are separated by distance, separated by time, or both. One common application of this ability is a montage sequence: "a sequence of film resulting from […] the process or technique of selecting, editing, and piecing together separate sections of film to form a continuous whole."[19] In a montage sequence, time and space are presented discontinuously, but this discontinuity is not problematic because audiences are familiar with and understand how to interpret a montage. However, in music-driven narrative films it is common for a musical number, and sometimes even a continuous vocal line, to continue across visual transitions in which a character or characters are shown singing whilst moving, as part of a montage, between different actions and locations with large gaps in the diegetic timeline. Such montage sequences are problematic because they attempt to portray temporal discontinuity while also attempting to maintain musical continuity.

Sometimes in a music-driven narrative film, the narrative will dictate that one or more of the characters give a musical performance, such as Velma's performance of "All That Jazz" from *Chicago* (2002). Such narratively justified diegetic performances seem odd as part of a fantasy diegesis in which spontaneous musical performance is apparently a frequent occurrence in everyday life. If music-driven narrative films truly are set in such a fantasy diegesis, this begs the question, "why would there be a need for specially designated musical performances in an already musically saturated

---

[19] *New Oxford American Dictionary.* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

fantasy world?" It is this peculiarity that most clearly highlights the flaw in uniformly treating all vocal and accompanimental music in music-driven narrative films as diegetic. Narratively justified performance exists in music-driven narrative films because the instances of spontaneous singing, dancing, and instrumental music have a different function and treatment from traditional diegetic music.

Singing as a Meta-Diegetic Element

As demonstrated in the previous section, the idea of a musical fantasy diegesis is not an effective way to analyze the use of music in music-driven narrative films. Audiences intuitively understand instances of singing and dancing in music-driven narrative films to be different from other diegetic actions. Moreover, unless justified by the narrative as a diegetic performance, the function and treatment of singing and dancing in the films themselves is different from that of other elements of the diegesis. Defining this kind of singing and dancing, as well as the accompanimental music, as meta-diegetic allows one to analyze the unique place meta-diegetic music holds within the narrative, the necessarily unusual treatment of meta-diegetic music, and the advantages or disadvantages of utilizing meta-diegetic music. To best analyze meta-diegetic music, one should also talk about *meta-diegetic scenes*: scenes in a film, usually built around a meta-diegetic aria or musical number, which temporarily suspend diegetic reality or temporal continuity.

So far this chapter has established that meta-diegetic music is different from other elements of the diegesis. To understand exactly why meta-diegetic music is unique requires a reevaluation of the concept of a *diegesis*. As Remigus Bunia observes, "the term *diegesis* — despite its rather widespread use among scholars —

lacks a coherent definition."[20] In his essay, "Diegesis and Representation," Bunia discusses several potential definitions and defining characteristics of a diegesis. For example:

> What is included in the diegesis depends on the particular "narrative context." The diegesis is populated with only those characters and contains only those events about which the narration informs.
>
> A diegesis is the narrated world restricted to what the narration concretely evokes.
>
> Diegesis should no longer be considered an analytical tool for narratological research but rather an epistemic phenomenon concerning how observers structure representations. […] As a core element of processing representation, diegesis helps us distinguish between what is explicitly asserted and what is merely implied.[21]

From earlier attempts to define diegesis, along with Bunia's discussion about fictional worlds, one might conclude that the diegesis is not simply the world inhabited by the characters; instead the diegesis is "a 'delimited field' within the world," closely tied to the presentation of this world by the narrator or film and also closely tied to the audience's reception of this limited portion of the world.[22]

If the diegesis represents only a portion of the world inhabited by the characters, then it may be useful to talk about the entire fictional world of which the diegesis is a part. To this end, this thesis will use the term *diegetic world* to refer to the world inhabited by the characters, including all objects, persons, and actions as they exist within this fictional world whether or not they are present in the diegesis or

---

[20] Bunia, "Diegesis and Representation." 679.

[21] Ibid, 686, 694, 716.

[22] Ibid., 701.

directly represented by the narrative. This thesis will use the term *filmic presentation* to refer to what the audience experiences directly while watching the film, including diegetic and non-diegetic elements as well as elements of the diegetic world that are altered or misrepresented in the filmic presentation. The unusual nature of meta-diegetic music and meta-diegetic scenes results from the interaction of the diegetic world and the filmic presentation.

Meta-diegetic scenes occur when the ostensibly diegetic portion of the filmic presentation is intentional, transparently, and unapologetically different from the portion of the diegetic world it represents. Thus meta-diegetic music is a highly stylized representation of some element of the diegetic world, as opposed to a realistic depiction of the diegetic world. The inherent unreality of the filmic presentation when altering the diegetic world is problematic for reasons discussed in the next chapter. Potentially, however, there are also significant advantages to using meta-diegetic music and meta-diegetic scenes.

Meta-diegetic music is able to directly address subjective elements, especially related to emotions and to the characters' internalized state of being. For this reason, meta-diegetic music and meta-diegetic scenes are very effective for expositional character development and for portraying believable character growth. Additionally, meta-diegetic music under the right circumstances can reduce the effective emotional distance between the audience and the characters. Therefore, meta-diegetic music may cause the audience to feel an immediate, strong, and long lasting connection with the characters. Meta-diegetic music can also more readily elicit a strong emotional response from the audience.

Meta-diegetic scenes are often set apart from the regular diegetic narrative. They may take place outside of the strict diegetic timeline, momentarily pausing reality, or they may take place within the diegetic timeline but temporarily suspend the need for realism or continuity. This allows characters to act according to the music and encourages focus on the subjective elements of the scene or narrative. Generally speaking, diegetic scenes are more adept at creating a literal impression of reality and tend to deal with character and plot from a more externalized or objective standpoint than meta-diegetic scenes. This is not to say that a film without meta-diegetic music cannot effectively depict emotions and character development that are internalized or subjective, but realistic diegetic scenes that address such elements typically rely heavily on dialogue and non-diegetic music.

Two examples may help to illustrate what I mean by a meta-diegetic scene. The first example is taken from *Les Miserables* (2012). Although the 2012 film, *Les Miserables*, is an adaptation of a stage musical, there are several isolated moments throughout the film that are highly effective in the cinematic medium. One such moment is Fantine's song, "I dreamed a dream." This example conforms to the unique treatment and narrative function of a traditional meta-diegetic scene, and also is a clear illustration of the qualities of meta-diegetic music discussed previously.

This scene occurs at the highest point of dramatic tension and emotion despair within Fantine's story arc. Following a series of traumatic ordeals Fantine, played by Anne Hathaway, sits alone and sings "I dreamed a dream." In this song, Fantine recalls the lover who abandoned her and her daughter. She reflects on her current state of affairs and the dreams she has lost. This is ideal content for a meta-diegetic scene. This musical number is built around an internalized narrative reflection, develops

Fantine's character, and portrays a highly charged emotional progression. Likewise, this scene takes place outside of regular continuity. In a realistic diegetic context, Fantine would not simply sit there and talk to herself about her past; moreover, if she did she would speak to herself, not sing.

If a spoken monologue equivalent to "I dreamed a dream" were found in a traditional non-musical film, it would most likely seem unnatural and could potentially call attention to itself in a way that detracts from the viewer's immersion in the diegesis. However, this kind of expositional soliloquy, especially given the emotional progression it conveys, is well suited to be set to music. Moreover, the fact that this soliloquy is presented outside of regular continuity, due to the temporary suspension of reality, is an altered filmic presentation of the diegetic world. This alteration allows for the use of meta-diegetic music in this scene. This works both ways; it is also the presence and centrality of meta-diegetic music in this scene that makes possible the momentary suspension of realism and continuity, which in turn allows exposition and character development to be addressed more directly than would not be possible in a realistic diegetic scene.

The second example, taken from *West Side Story* (1961), demonstrates a very different kind of meta-diegetic scene. It is possible, and not unusual, for a meta-diegetic scene to advance the plot and to present diegetic action in a seemingly objective or external manner. For example, look at the opening scene to *West Side Story* in which the Jets and Sharks fight each other through a maze of city streets. Although there is no meta-diegetic singing, this scene features meta-diegetic musical accompaniment and is built around metrically organized meta-diegetic movement. In this scene, the filmic presentation uses dancing and stylized rhythmic-walking to

represent fighting, running, and other confrontational actions. In one sense this scene operates like traditional fight sequence, featuring an externalized conflict between two groups of characters. This scene also serves to advance the plot and does not suspend temporal continuity, since the dancing takes place in real time and replaces only the physical action of the fighting. That being said, this is a meta-diegetic scene and by nature demands some degree of suspension of reality; the dancing is a stylized representation that could not happen according to the normal rules of this realistic diegetic world. This scene is not a literal depiction of realistic diegetic action.

What is especially interesting about the *West Side Story* example is that, although at first it seems to be the polar opposite of the *Les Misérables* example, a closer examination reveals that these two scenes function very similarly. Although the fight scene from *West Side Story* depicts fighting and interpersonal conflict, which would are externalized actions, the presentation of these actions still favors subjectivity. The use of meta-diegetic music in the filmic presentation highlights the emotional and internalized aspects of the conflict. The use of stylized movement and dancing in place of explicit fight choreography refocuses attention to the meaning behind this scene, which is essential to its expositional function within the narrative. Instead of violence, the meta-diegetic presentation highlights the anger and emotional hostility that the characters feel towards one another. Thus, this meta-diegetic scene favors character development and other emotional, subjective, and internalized issues.

Although "I dreamed a dream" arguably suspends temporal continuity, whereas the first scene of *West Side Story* does not, both of these scenes are altered filmic presentations of the diegetic world. In both cases, this alteration momentarily suspends the need for realism in the filmic presentation. In both cases, this suspension

realism allows for the use of the meta-diegetic music. Also, the altered filmic presentations themselves are enabled by the use of meta-diegetic music. In both the *Les Miserables* example and the *West Side Story* example, the suspension of realism in the filmic presentation allows for a greater focus on character development and subjective issues, especially those pertaining to emotions.

There is one more function of meta-diegetic music that I have not yet addressed. In addition to its other narrative functions, meta-diegetic music is often used for its entertainment value. As will be discussed chapter seven, the entertainment function of meta-diegetic music is especially important in the Hollywood movie musical tradition. The entertainment function of meta-diegetic music could account for the apparently significant differences between the two previous examples of meta-diegetic scenes. The intentional use of entertainment is more apparent in the *West Side Story* example, which is built around spectacular choreography. This is part of the reason why the action in the *West Side Story* example feels more externalized. However, the *Les Misérables* example also features meta-diegetic music partly because it is entertaining to watch and listen to a well-performed musical number. In fact, almost all meta-diegetic scenes exist to some degree because of the entertainment value of musical performance.

So far, this chapter has proposed a revised definition of the term *meta-diegetic music* and has introduced the concept of the *meta-diegetic scenes*. This chapter also offered an explanation for why meta-diegetic music and meta-diegetic scenes are different from other diegetic elements of film, as well as examples of the benefits of using meta-diegetic music and meta-diegetic scenes. However, the transparently

unrealistic nature of meta-diegetic scenes and meta-diegetic music is still problematic. How this problematic unreality may be addressed is the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter 3

Verisimilitude and the 'Buy-In' Factor

Chapter two introduced the idea that narrative films traditionally attempt to create an illusion of reality. Although the filmic presentation may be augmented by non-diegetic elements, such as non-diegetic film scoring, the audience should view the film under the impression that the diegesis they witness is an unaltered presentation of a portion of the diegetic world. This is one of the conclusions of Laura Mulvey's article, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema:"

> There are three different looks associated with cinema […] The conventions of narrative film deny the first two and subordinate them to the third, [the look of the characters at each other within the screen illusion,] the conscious aim always being to eliminate intrusive camera presences and prevent a distancing awareness in the audience. […] The camera's look is disavowed in order to create a convincing world in which the spectator's surrogate can perform with verisimilitude.[23]

In other words, although the audience and camera are inherently present and affect the world of the film, during the film viewing experience the audience desires to act as an anonymous voyeur. Therefore, narrative films traditionally are constructed in such a way that the role of the spectator in constructing the diegesis and affecting the filmic presentation is disguised as much as possible.

---

[23] Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16, no. 3 (Autumn 1975): 6–18.

Music-driven narrative films are problematic given these traditional criteria. Not only are meta-diegetic music and meta-diegetic scenes unrealistic according to the rules of the real world, but the nature of the filmic presentation as an alteration of the diegetic world undermines the audience's expectation of reality within the diegesis. Moreover, if meta-diegetic music and meta-diegetic scenes are highly stylized representations of the diegetic world, as opposed to realistic depictions of the diegetic world, then the purpose of using such an altered filmic presentation must be to benefit an audience and such an altered filmic presentation can only occur if an audience exists to receive this benefit. Therefore, the use of meta-diegetic music and meta-diegetic scenes implicitly acknowledges the presences of the audience.

The danger created by this implicit acknowledgment is that the audience may become self-aware of their role as voyeur and of the fact that they are watching a film. This is an incarnation of the “distancing awareness” that Mulvey talks about. When the audience becomes too consciously aware of themselves and of the film, they are more likely to recognize and to reject the unrealistic nature of the filmic presentation. Also, if they are too self-aware while watching a given film, the audience may become less immersed in the film viewing experience and consequently they may become less emotionally invested in the characters and the diegetic action. These two potential consequences have a spiraling effect. If the audience perceives the filmic presentation as unrealistic then they will become less immersed in the film; vice versa, if the audience is not fully immersed in the film then they are more likely to recognize the unrealistic elements of the film presentation.

These issues are not unique to music-driven narrative films. Almost all filmic presentations in traditional film genres are unrealistic to an extent. Moreover, the

filmic medium itself is mechanical and therefore it is inherently unrealistic, which is ironic since audiences expect a greater appearance of reality from narrative film than almost any other form of storytelling. However, not only are meta-diegetic music and meta-diegetic scenes a significant departure from the reality of the diegetic world, but the unrealistic nature of the filmic presentation during meta-diegetic music and meta-diegetic scenes is left completely undisguised. This is one of the issues that Barry Grant talks about in the introduction to his book *The Hollywood Film Musical*:

> The film musical, perhaps more than any other genre, has always foregrounded its nature as a generic construct and has thus demanded the greatest suspension of disbelief from the viewer.[24]

In other words, music-driven narrative films are not inherently more unrealistic than other traditional genres of film, but the use of meta-diegetic music and meta-diegetic scenes draws attention to the unrealistic elements of these films.

Since meta-diegetic music and meta-diegetic scenes defy traditional expectations of diegetic realism, and because they call attention to themselves and their unrealistic nature, one of the most significant audience contributions to the success of music-driven narrative films is something called the *buy-in factor*. Similar to suspension of disbelief, the buy-in factor is dependent on the audience's willingness to ignore or to overlook the unrealistic elements of the filmic presentation, especially meta-diegetic music and meta-diegetic scenes. The buy-in factor is also tied to the audience's immersion in the film. If the audience "buys into" the film presentation, then ideally they will become immersed in the characters, the story, and the

---

[24] Barry Keith Grant, *The Hollywood Film Musical* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 3.

entertainment of the film and, on a conscious level, they will forget the delivery method and their own role as spectators.

Audience buy-in is essential to success of all narrative films, and to music-driven narrative films especially. If an audience fully buys into a given film during moments of meta-diegetic music or meta-diegetic scenes then they are less likely to be distracted or disturbed by the unrealistic elements of the filmic presentation. Moreover, meta-diegetic music and meta-diegetic scenes often code information through devices that are most immediately effective if processed on a subconscious level, such as music. Likewise, the entertainment value of meta-diegetic music and meta-diegetic scenes come from elements that are traditionally meant to be passively enjoyed rather than consciously analyzed, such as music and dance. However, for such devices to be effective the audience must not construct any conscious barriers that might obstruct the subconscious influence of these elements; the audience must be fully immersed and emotionally invested in the film. Therefore, to receive the full benefits of meta-diegetic music the audience must first "buy into" the filmic presentation.

Closely related to the buy-in factor is *verisimilitude*. Verisimilitude is defined as "the appearance of being true or real."[25] It is important to note that verisimilitude is not based on a literal depiction of reality, but instead is based on creating the impression of reality. One way to look at this is to say that elements of a film that are verisimilar are realistic with respect to the filmic presentation although they may be

---

[25] *New Oxford American Dictionary.* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

unrealistic with respect to the diegetic world. Thus meta-diegetic music can be verisimilar in the context of a particular film even though meta-diegetic music is inherently unrealistic. Ensuring that all unrealistic elements of the filmic presentation are verisimilar is an important step towards promoting audience "buy-in." In this way, despite audience expectations, the goal of narrative films is never to be literally realistic, but instead the goal is always to create verisimilitude. This is especially true of meta-diegetic music and meta-diegetic scenes, where verisimilitude is most difficult to achieve.

The filmic presentation of most Hollywood style narrative films, regardless of genre, are augmented by non-diegetic elements, such as non-diegetic film scoring. Traditionally, non-diegetic elements of the filmic presentation are not problematic, even though they are clearly undisguised departures from a literal depiction of the diegetic world. This begs the question, why does non-diegetic music not have the same difficulty achieving verisimilitude as meta-diegetic music?

One simple answer to this question is to say that non-diegetic film scoring is unproblematic because it is a well-established convention. This is true, to a degree. The use of non-diegetic film scoring is familiar to audiences immersed in Hollywood-style media culture. Therefore, the presence of non-diegetic music is not distracting to such audiences and does not detract from their sense of verisimilitude. However, this may be too simplistic of an explanation. The familiarity argument implies that audiences merely accept film scoring, as if audiences have learned to “tune-out” non-diegetic music. This is not the case, since most audiences do respond to film-score music, if only on a subconscious level. Moreover, the total absence of non-diegetic music can detract from verisimilitude. This phenomenon could also be explained as

another result of familiarity; audiences expect a musical score and therefore the absence of non-diegetic music is interpreted as a mistake, leading to decreased verisimilitude. However, scholars such as Claudia Gorbman have proposed more compelling explanations for the persistence of non-diegetic music.

After acknowledging that "nondiegetic music simply does not logically belong in a diegetic film," Gorbman reaches the conclusion that:

> Music has persisted as an integral part of the sound film because if accomplishes so many things. […] Film music is at once a gel, a space, a language, a cradle, a beat, a signifier of internal depth and emotion as well as a provider of emphasis on visual movement and spectacle. […] the two overarching roles of background music may be characterized as semiotic (as *ancrage*) and psychological (as suture or *bonding)*.[26]

Many of the specific functions of film scores, as described by Gorbman, are similar to the benefits of meta-diegetic music. Paradoxically, however, many of Gorbman's proposed benefits of non-diegetic music are solutions for the same kinds of problems that meta-diegetic music and meta-diegetic scenes cause, particularly with regard to the buy-in factor.

Gorbman asserts that non-diegetic music has the ability to "remove barriers to belief" and to restore temporal flexibility despite the "relentless linearity" of diegetic sound.[27] In other words, non-diegetic music disguises some of the unrealistic elements of the filmic medium and allows for flexibility in the filmic presentation, especially in terms of temporal continuity. These are the same characteristics of meta-diegetic

---

[26] Claudia Gorbam, *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (Bloominton: Indiana University Press, 1987), 55.

[27] Ibid.

music that allow for the existence of meta-diegetic scenes. Gorbman also observes that film music "*interprets* the image, pinpoints and channels the 'correct' meaning of the narrative events depicted."[28] In other words, non-diegetic music helps to guide the audience by attaching specific meaning to characters, actions, and events by coding this meaning in the music. This is similar to the ability of meta-diegetic music and meta-diegetic scenes to directly address subjective issues related to emotion and character development.

Gorbman defines the qualities discussed previously as *semiotic* functions of film music. From a more psychological perspective, Gorbman asserts that pleasure is derived simply from the presence of music in film, which functions both as a "sonorous envelope" and as "a nonrepresentational discourse."[29] This is similar to the entertainment function of meta-diegetic music. Gorbman also asserts that non-diegetic music has the ability to form a bond between the subject-spectator (audience) and the film without allowing the subject to become fully conscious of their role in the filmic discourse.[30] This is similar to the ability of meta-diegetic music to rapidly elicit a strong emotional response from the audience and to generate empathy towards the characters engaged in producing such meta-diegetic music.

One important function of film music described by Gorbman that does not correlate well with meta-diegetic counterpart is the ability of non-diegetic music "to lull the spectator into being an *untroublesome* (less critical, less wary) *viewing*

---

[28] Ibid., 58.

[29] Ibid., 60–63.

[30] Ibid., 64.

subject" and, in doing so, help to ward off "the spectator's potential recognition of the technological [unrealistic] basis of filmic articulation."[31] Although the strictly musical component of meta-diegetic music does sometimes contribute to verisimilitude, a non-critical attitude is usually a prerequisite for audience buy-in during meta-diegetic scenes and not a result of the music itself.

To summarize Gorbman's explanation of the roles of music in film, non-diegetic music aids audience interpretation and allows for a flexible representation of the diegesis in the filmic presentation. In this way, non-diegetic music is similar to meta-diegetic music. However, unlike non-diegetic music, which usually enhances verisimilitude, meta-diegetic is readily identifiable as unrealistic and therefore may detract from verisimilitude. This essential difference between non-diegetic music and meta-diegetic music derives from a difference in hierarchy in the filmic presentation. Gorbman observes that "film music is normally subordinated to more 'directly' significant sounds on the soundtrack, and to the demands of 'the narrative itself'."[32] However, meta-diegetic music cannot be subordinated in this way. During meta-diegetic scenes the music must be equally important to the narrative, if not of higher importance. Moreover, non-diegetic music operates separately from the diegetic action. Although the film score is part of the filmic presentation, non-diegetic music is traditionally interpreted as separate from the diegetic action presented on screen. Thus the audience can imagine that the addition of non-diegetic music has no effect on the literal depiction of the diegetic world. In the case of meta-diegetic scenes, however,

---

[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid., 59.

there can be no illusion of an unfiltered diegesis; meta-diegetic music and meta-diegetic scenes clearly replace any form of realistic filmic presentation.

PART 2 : GENRES OF MUSIC-DRIVEN NARRATIVE FILM

The history of films built around sung music, especially meta-diegetic music, can be divided generally into five categories: motion picture opera, television opera, film opera adaptations, movie musicals, and rock operas. These correspond to the five most significant genres of music-driven narrative film. These genres are identified in part by characteristic traits of the films themselves, and in part by traditions and historical contexts that surrounded the creation of these films. Chapters four through seven of this thesis provide an overview of the historical development of music-driven narrative film, presented in the form of individual discussions of each of the five genres listed above. By examining theoretical, production-related, and historical issues surrounding each of these five genres, we can hypothesize how music and storytelling could be more effectively combined in the filmic medium.

Chapter 4

Motion Picture Opera

"Motion picture opera" is not exactly a genre. Instead, motion picture opera is better thought of as movement, made up of loosely related ideas and individuals from the late silent film era and early sound film era, from the 1920s to the 1940s. Although not defined by a single school of thought, the motion picture opera movement overall envisioned and worked towards a new relationship between opera and film.

Ultimately, advocates of motion picture opera sought to create original operas composed specifically for the silver screen. The ideals of the motion picture opera movement during its heyday are best defined by a passage from Marcia Citron's book *Opera on Screen*, summarizing George Antheil's proposed solution to the problem of how to create "opera for the movies":

> With newly composed music and other adjustments tailored to the medium, "motion-picture-operas" would be more suitable than a condensation of a stage work.[33]

A statement by Ernst Toch, quoted in the *New York Times* in 1937, expands on this same vision and provides further justification of the need for original film operas:

> The focus of film music to come is the original film opera. This cannot be done by adapting old operas for the screen, for the conception of stage-opera music is bound to be different from what film opera must be. To adapt existing operas—with their arias, duets, ensembles,

---

[33] Marcia J. Citron, *Opera on Screen* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 31. George Antheil, "On the Hollywood Front," *Modern Music* 14/2 (1936), 48.

> finales, dances, marches and the like—means to mutilate either screen action or the music itself. Music of film opera has to create and develop its own forms out of typical screen action, combining its different laws of space, time and motion with constant music laws.[34]

Although Antheil and Toch's statements were not written directly in response to one another, they both reflect the desire for original film operas and a belief that the future of opera in cinema required something different than simply adapting pre-existing stage operas. Leading up to and surrounding the desire for original motion picture operas, many contemporary critics and filmmakers sought to combine opera and cinema as a tool to alter public tastes and to reshape contemporary stage and screen practices.

Opera and Early Hollywood Cinema

The roots of the motion picture opera movement can be traced back well into the silent-film era, when filmmakers drew upon opera stories for source material and sometimes used opera stars as film actors and actresses. These practices continued into the early sound-film era although the films themselves, in America at least, tended more towards light operettas and opera excerpts within non-operatic films. During this time period, film was generally considered a populist and lowbrow medium. Thus, although economic considerations such as star-power and copyright-free material were strong influences in Hollywood production practices, much of the reason Hollywood turned to opera was an attempt to bring prestige to film, as illustrated in a statement by Will Hays, president of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributers of America:

---

[34] Ernst Toch, quoted in Frank S. Nugent, "Reflections of Passing Events in the Screen World: The Cinema Wields the Baton," *New York Times*, 11 April 1937.

> Many factors in recent years […] have combined to hasten the day when, by reason of the screen, the crossroads will be the golden horseshoe of the opera.[35]

This search for legitimacy through operatic prestige is not unlike the reasoning suggested by Scott Paulin behind the adoption of operatic techniques and Wagnerian terminology by early film score composers, tailored to "increasingly a more sophisticated, middle-class audience."[36]

However, those who advocated for Hollywood's use of opera and operatic elements were not solely interested in the advancement of motion pictures. There was a hope that film could bring opera to the masses and thereby revitalize popular interest in classical music. As one writer from this period observed:

> The films may truthfully be said to have revived our interest in music; they have infused a new life blood into an art that was becoming lost in a jazz age.[37]

Even well past the era of motion picture opera, this hope to shift public taste in music and to revitalize opera continued to be an important goal of film and television operas, as well as the practice of recording and broadcasting of live-stage productions, as noted by Citron with regards to the early television era:

> Sensing a rare opportunity in the populist medium, the pioneers of screen opera attempted to instill the European affinity for opera in an America in search of its own operatic expression. Such utopian ideals

---

[35] Will Hays, quoted in Nugent, "Cinema Wields the Baton."

[36] Scott D. Paulin, "Richard Wagner and the Fantasy of Cinematic Unity: The Idea of the Gesamtkunstwerk in the History and Theory of Film Music," in *Music and Cinema* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2000), 78.

[37] Harrison Lawler, "Opera on the Screen," *The Etude* 34/5 (May 1936), 284.

> were not confined to the United States, however. Many countries hoped to rejuvenate opera through new works for the new medium.[38]

The desire to reshape public interests worked both ways, as exemplified in an article by Harrison Lawler, published in 1936.[39] Although Lawler does acknowledge the role of film in reviving classical music, he also notes the importance of updating the tastes and expectations of the current opera-going public:

> It is not enough for motion picture audiences to become opera fans — opera audiences must also become movie fans.[40]

Lawler and many of his contemporaries believed that opera on screen, both original motion picture operas and adaptations of grand opera, would play an important role in reshaping the practices of opera on stage. This sentiment is echoed in the statements of two opera singers of the day who worked in Hollywood, as quoted in Lawler's article:

> Through the motion picture screen our country is being made opera conscious. […] Ultimately this will result in the building of an audience that will support grand opera, both on the stage and on the screen, in far greater scope than ever before. […] practically the entire structure of opera must be Americanized if Americans are to support it.[41]

Amongst other coming changes, Lawler predicted "a reversal of the current trend of grand opera stars towards [Hollywood];" Lawler believed that increased popularity of screen operas combined with inherently greater exposure though film would result in a new population of opera stars, bred in Hollywood, such that eventually "grand opera

---

[38] Citron, *Opera on Screen*, 20.

[39] Lawler, "Opera on the Screen," 283-284.

[40] Ibid., 283.

[41] Gladys Swarthout, Grace More, and Jeanette MacDonald, quoted in Lawler, "Opera on the Screen," 283.

will ask for stars from Hollywood."[42] Trained under the tighter scrutiny of the motion picture camera, this new school of opera singers would develop skills in acting and the art of pantomime that Lawler saw as currently missing in opera on stage. Lawler predicted that, "with this technical revision, they [the opera singers] will find it of immense benefit when they return to the stage." Thus, the new school of opera singers bred for the screen would ultimately also improve acting and performance in opera on stage.

In his article, Lawler also advocated for "presenting to us entire operas in our own language," as well as the possibility of color photography to "add considerably to the attractiveness of the screen presentation of operas" and to "contribute to plot-promotion and be almost certain to capture genuine popularity."[43] In this respect, Lawler went so far as to predict that

> one hit production, one hundred percent in color, of an operatic version, could conceivably start a stamped of producers towards this trend, even now, and might be the beginning of a new revelation in filmmaking, comparable to the upheaval created when the screen first learned to talk.[44]

Although this remark applies to one technical component of film, the sentiment could be extended to Lawler's other predictions or even to opera on screen in general. Unfortunately this "one hit production," for motion picture opera at least, was not destined to occur. Just eight months after Lawler published his article, January 1937 saw the premiere of *The Robber Symphony*.

---

[42] Lawler, "Opera on the Screen," 283.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid.

Motion Picture Opera in Practice

There are actually two films historically that could be called true motion picture operas — that is to say they are commonly associated with the motion picture opera movement and they were originally composed specifically for the silver screen and produced on film. The first of these is Ferdinand Hummel's *Jenseits des Stromes* (1922). Produced during the silent film era, *Jenseits des Stromes* employed musical notation on screen, intended to guide a live orchestra and operatic soloists performing in tandem with the presentation of the film.[45] Unfortunately, no copies of *Jenseits des Stromes* have survived.

The second and most significant motion picture opera is Friedrich Feher's *The Robber Symphony* (1936). *The Robber Symphony* is self-declared to be "the First 'Composed' Film," as stated in the opening credits.[46] Despite this claim, there is a conspicuous lack of meta-diegetic music in this film, either in the form of sung dialogue or meta-diegetic arias, although there are several diegetic musical performances throughout. Also, significant portions of *The Robber Symphony* are built around spoken dialogue and do not include music of any kind, even non-diegetic film scoring. Lacing these tradition hallmarks of music-driven narrative film genres, *The Robber Symphony*'s common definition as a kind of film opera is problematic.

That being said, it cannot be denied that music does play a prominent role in the story and filmic presentation of *The Robber Symphony*. *The Robber Symphony* opens with an overture, lasting almost seven minutes, featuring the orchestra by itself on a concert stage. Thus the opening sequence mirrors a traditional operatic overture,

---

[45] Citron, *Opera on Screen*, 31.

[46] Friedrich Feher, *The Robber Symphony*, 1937.

establishing *The Robber Symphony* in the historical context of the stage genre while also reinforcing the expectations of a musical film "composed" like a "symphony", as suggested by the film's title and opening credits. After the overture, however, the orchestra and conductor are not seen again until the last few seconds of the film.

Much of *The Robber Symphony* is made up of scenes without dialogue, in which the diegetic sound track is replaced by non-diegetic music. Given that *The Robber Symphony* is a "composed film," one would expect that the action in these scenes to respond directly to the music. While it is true that some isolated moments are tightly coordinated with the non-diegetic soundtrack, by and large the actions in these scenes only generally parallel the progression of the music. The actors employ pantomime and acting techniques strongly resembling silent film acting. The effect is that the acting seems tied more to the narrative action than to the music.

As mentioned previously, defining *The Robber Symphony* as a king of film opera is problematic in part because there is no meta-diegetic music. When characters interact with each other, it is almost always through spoken dialogue, pantomime, or written communications. Although almost all of the main characters sing, dance, or play music at some point in the film, these are always clearly diegetic actions, usually justified as a performance. The one major exception to this is the gang of robbers, who communicate with each other in the mountains through "calls" that manifest as fragments of music. Although these calls are written into the otherwise non-diegetic musical soundtrack, the visuals reveal that they are calling out by singing or playing music diegetically. This is especially clear in the case of the two robbers whose calls are instrumental music. Although they are the only characters we never hear speak in words, this is partially because the only chance they have to speak, other than

pantomimed whispers, is when they are calling. The would-be substitution of their dialogue for music, namely their calls, is as close as *The Robber Symphony* comes to meta-diegetic music. However, throughout the film these characters carry their oboe and bassoon with them, and the snippets of music representing their calls are fragments of solo melody corresponding to the correct instruments. They are absurd and fantastical characters, but their instrumental-dialogue is in fact diegetic music.

One begins to wonder just what the filmmakers meant by "the first 'composed' film." Perhaps they simply meant that the music preexisted the filming and therefore the action on screen was guided by the musical structure, even if this is not always readily apparent.[47] Similar techniques were already practiced in the creation of animated cartoons, which Antheil describes as "operas in the purest sense of the word — they are little music-dramas;" unlike the cartoons, however, the dialogue scenes and visuals in *The Robber Symphony* can hardly be described as "superlative eye-accompaniment."[48]

In any case, *The Robber Symphony* was recognized in its own time as an original opera for film and continues to be acknowledged as such historically. One critic of the day went so far to say, "Here, perhaps is opera's legitimate successor."[49] Unfortunately, despite some critical acclaim, *The Robber Symphony* was not popularly

---

[47] I do not know definitively if this was the case. However, the filmmakers' claim does suggest that the music was composed and probably recorded before filming. Moreover, the few instances where the on-screen action is closely aligned with or seems to reference the musical score further support this interpretation.

[48] Antheil, "On the Hollywood Front," 48.

[49] Anonymous, quoted in Mervyn Cooke, "Opera and Film," in *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century Opera*, 2005, 283.

successful. This may account in part for why no further original motion picture operas were produced during this era and why the motion picture opera movement died out.

There are two major lessons to be learned from the history of motion picture opera for the future practitioners of original music-driven narrative films. First, as illustrated by the fate of *The Robber Symphony* and the subsequent demise of motion picture opera, it is not enough for original music driven narrative films simply to have artistic merit; they must also be commercially viable. As much as filmmakers and producers may work to add prestige to films, in Hollywood-based media culture the screen is still a form of populist entertainment. As such, the future success of music-driven narrative films depends on producing such films with enough popular appeal to support themselves financially.

The second lesson is one of action over theory. The end of the motion picture opera movement was not the failure of one film, but a result of the fact that no subsequent motion picture operas were produced and that the changes advocated by people like Lawler never fully took hold. Despite widespread critical agreement by the mid-1930s that successful motion picture operas needed to be more than simply adaptations, Hollywood itself never produced an original opera for film during this period. Much of the problem can likely be attributed to Hollywood's unwillingness to invest in potentially risky films and to the success of the more popular movie musical genre. However, without a community actively supporting and engaged in the creation of original operas for film it was inevitable that the motion picture opera movement would never succeed. Not only this, but without a steady supply of opera films, Hollywood could neither facilitate the growth of Lawler's new school of opera stars nor accommodate any of his other predicted changes.

Chapter 5

Television Opera

Unlike the motion picture opera movement, television opera as a genre in the United States and United Kingdom built up a strong tradition of commissioning new works originally composed for television production and distribution. Historically, television opera is one of the most significant and most successful genres of music driven narrative film commonly associated with opera. Especially in the 1950s and 1960s, many television operas were critically successful and attracted a substantial enough audience to make television opera productions profitable.

The history of television opera begins in the late 1930s and early 1940s. During this time NBC in the United States and the BBC in the United Kingdom each began experimenting with broadcasting opera via television. These early attempts were studio productions of opera scenes and excerpts. Unfortunately, most of these efforts ceased during World War II and it wasn't until the late 1940s that television opera fully began to take form. In late November 1948, The American Broadcasting Corporation aired a telecast of *Otello*, the opening performance of the Metropolitan Opera's 1948-49 season. [50] As Marcia Citron relates, "Approximately 500,000 homes

---

[50] Herbert Graf asserts that this production of *Otello* was "the first telecast from an operatic stage." Herbert Graf, " 'Saving Angel' Says Met Stage Director," *Musical America* 73 (February 1953), 22. However, Graf's statement conflicts with Marcia Citron's claim that, "After the WWI, the BBC resumed broadcasts of operas, and by 1947 these included relays from the opera house." Citron, *Opera on Screen*, 43.

tuned in to the event, an astonishing figure given that so few owned a television set."[51] This impressive public response inspired renewed efforts by other television studios towards the production of television operas.

The NBC Television Opera Theatre (sometimes referred to as the NBC Opera Theatre or the NBC Opera Company) officially launched in 1950, headed by producer Samuel Chotzinoff and musical/artistic director Peter Herman Adler. Kirk Browning was also an important figure in NBC Opera Theatre and served as television director for many of its most important productions, including the original *Amahl and the Night Visitors*. CBS also produced television operas, first as the CBS Opera Television Theater in 1948–1950 then as part of the series *Omnibus* starting in 1953. However, CBS's early involvement in television opera was limited and, although CBS did become more active later on, NBC remained the most important producer of television opera in America throughout the genre's heyday.[52] In the United Kingdom, the BBC was an important producer of television opera and, in many respects, paralleled the success and significance of NBC.

On Christmas Eve, 1951, the NBC Opera Theatre broadcast the premiere of Gian Carlo Menotti's *Amahl and the Night Visitors*, the first opera ever commissioned specifically for television. This new television opera was a great success, so much so that it received thirteen subsequent broadcasts across five different productions, as well as consistent commercial sponsorship. As Jennifer Barnes points out, *Amahl* represents one of the "few times in television history [when] business associated a

---

[51] Ibid., 43.

[52] Ibid., 42–46.

particular opera with the propensity to make money, rather than lose money."[53] During its fifteen seasons, the NBC Opera Theatre commissioned and produced a total of ten original operas for television. The BBC commissioned and produced sixteen original television operas between 1956 and 1991, twelve prior to 1970. CBS commissioned and produced seven original television operas between 1959 and 1974.[54]

Unfortunately, the success of television opera was short lived. The NBC Television Opera Theatre lasted for only fifteen seasons. Although the NBC Opera Theatre was superseded by the NET Opera Company (a venture for noncommercial television whose staff included veterans of NBC such as Adler and Browning) as well as increased efforts from CBS, television operas in the United States entered a decline. Studio productions were eventually replaced by less expensive relays of live stage-opera performances. As Marcia Citron observes, "commercial stations withdrew opera funding from their programs after the demise of the NBC Opera Theatre and noncommercial outlets became opera's main venue."[55] Writing in 1957, Kenneth Wright (Head of Music for the BBC, 1951–1956) predicted that the rise of a television network devoted specifically to the arts would facilitate increased production and greater experimentation within television opera:

> Only with two balanced programmes can it [the BBC] cater properly and regularly to minorities, including opera lovers. Then only can it

---

[53] Jennifer Barnes, *Television Opera* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2003), 19.

[54] For a complete list of operas commissioned for television in the United States and Great Britain, see Barnes, *Television Opera*, 103–104.

[55] Citron, *Opera on Screen*, 46–47.

> devote time to specialized subjects and experiments which many music lovers would like to see. Untold possibilities would open with the creation of a second programme.[56]

This vision did partially come true; many film opera adaptations and relays of stage opera found distribution primarily on public television, cable networks devoted to the arts, and home video. However, the kind of experimentation that Wright had hoped for only came to exist in small pockets throughout history, such as Stravinsky's *The Flood* and Menotti's *Labyrinth* from the early 1960s and the five operas commissioned by Channel 4 that premiered in the early 1990s. Even these isolated examples are problematic. Despite a desire for experimentation, most of their executions and production histories exhibit the traditional endemic issues that plague other television operas, as will be discussed in a later section.

Ultimately, the demise of television opera can be observed in the declining frequency of commissions for original operas for television over time. In the United States, not a single new television opera was commissioned after 1974. In the United Kingdom, commissions decreased leading up to the 1980s, a decade in which no new television operas were commissioned at all. Although Channel 4 did commission and produce several operas for television during the early 1990s, very few television operas have been produced in the United Kingdom since.

What is Television Opera?

Having observed the growth of this new form and speculating about its future impact Herbert Graf, a stage director at the Metropolitan Opera from 1936 to 1960, identified three kinds of opera telecasts: "studio telecasting," "direct telecasting from

---

[56] Kenneth A. Wright, "Television and Opera," *Tempo*, no. 45 (Autumn 1957), 14.

the opera house into homes," and "closed-circuit telecasts to theaters."[57] Although not always so clearly laid out, an acknowledgment of these categories is implicit in the writings of many contemporaneous critics and creators of television opera. For purposes of defining television opera as a genre, however, this thesis will only include the first variety (studio telecasts). Although the latter two are historically significant in the development of television opera and opera on screen, they are excluded from the definition of television opera used in this thesis because, despite any accommodations made for the camera, such telecasts of stage productions are still fundamentally new distributions of works for the stage.

Television operas are studio productions designed specifically for television broadcast. In addition, live performance is an important defining characteristic of the genre in these terms. In many respects the development of television opera is closely tied to technological innovation. All early television operas were broadcast live using a single-studio system in which the singers and orchestra were in the same studio and, with only a few exceptions, the performers on-screen were the opera singers themselves. The single studio system was gradually replaced by the two-studio system in which the orchestra and actors/singers were recorded simultaneously but in separate studios. However, the single-studio system was still favored by some who did not feel comfortable separating the conductor from the vocalists. Therefore, the single-studio system was still occasionally used as late as the 1970s. Eventually television operas were pre-recorded on tape for broadcast at a later date, but these recordings still were of a single continuous performance with music and visuals recorded simultaneously.

---

[57] Graf, "'Saving Angel' Says Met Stage Director," 138.

The discussions of television opera in thesis are based on how television opera came to be in the United States and the United Kingdom, as exemplified by the works of the NBC Opera Theatre. Kenneth Wright's article "Television and Opera" includes a brief discussion of how opera for television existed in various countries. This discussion centers primarily on the relative merits of live or direct transmission versus what Wright calls "the playback method." [58] Wright hypothesizes situations in which one particular method or a combination of the two methods could be beneficial to productions of certain operas. Although Wright does not offer a definitive judgment, one is left with the impression that he prefers direct transmission except in cases where the use of another method is justified by the demands of a specific opera.

By the 1960s, television opera began adapting some production techniques from film. These borrowed techniques included post-production editing, filming across several days, some basic special effects, and the occasional inclusion of still images or video recorded separately from the soundtrack, which sometimes included on-location shots. These technological advances and borrowed techniques allowed for greater flexibility and experimentation in production and content. For example, many of these techniques played an important part in the production of Menotti's *Labyrinth* (1961), an opera said to only be able to exist on screen. Even with the borrowing of these new techniques and non-continuous recording, however, live performance still continued to be an important characteristic of television opera as audio and visuals were recorded simultaneously and as the actors sang their own parts.

---

[58] Wright, "Television and Opera," 10–11.

Critics of the day, as well as those who created television operas, were generally in agreement that television opera demanded something different from stage operas. However, they disagreed as to whether or not this quality could only be achieved by newly commissioned television operas. Graf believed that the limitation of television precluded the successful production of grand operas, but did not necessarily detract from all stage operas:

> For these reasons, the most successful telecasts were those of either Menotti's Amahl written with the medium's limitations in mind or intimate one-act operas such as Puccini's Il Tabarro and Gianni Schicchi.[59]

Given an opera of appropriate scale, Graf seems to be of the opinion that whether an opera was written for a specific medium was less important than whether or not the production itself was conceived for that medium. This is implicit in his comments on studio telecasting:

> Studio telecasting of opera has proved to be the most satisfactory kind […] for the production could be conceived and executed with full regard to the particular requirements of the new medium.[60]

Samuel Chotzinoff, producer for the NBC Opera Theatre, believed that stage operas could be successfully adapted for television. However, he believed that the most successful television operas were those especially written for the medium:

> But the best realization of the television potential lies in works especially written for television or written with an eye to the

---

[59] Graf, "'Saving Angel' Says Met Stage Director," 138.

[60] Ibid.

> possibilities of television […] These operas have proved to be more impressive on the television than in the theatre.[61]

Of course, many of the NBC Opera Theatres productions, such as *Scenes from Billy Budd* (1952), were adaptations of stage operas and were highly successfully in the television medium. However, it is worth noting that a large part of *Billy Budd*'s success can be attributed to significant cuts and modifications to the original score and libretto.

When deciding whether or not to include only operas originally composed for television in the genre of television opera, one must also consider the fact that most operas commissioned for television were subsequently produced on stage and many are now better known as stage operas than as television operas. Thus, it seems appropriate to include both original television operas and studio productions of operas originally composed for the stage as part of the definition of the television opera genre, provided that these productions are constructed and, if necessary, the operas are modified in such a way as to satisfy the unique requirements of television opera and to take full advantage of the television medium.

Parallels with Motion Picture Opera

In order to apply this working definition of television opera, one must determine what are the specific requirements of television and what does it mean to take full advantage of the television medium. Not surprisingly, these issues were of great importance to contemporary critics and the creators of television opera. Their assessments of television opera and the specific requirements of the television medium

---

[61] Samuel Chotzinoff, "NBC Music Chief Sees New Approach," *Musical America* 73 (February 1953), 138.

can be found in the articles they wrote during the era of television opera, especially from the mid to late 1950s. Many of the discussions and ideas found in these articles are a close parallel to those surrounding the motion picture opera movements, most of which were written approximately two decades earlier. For example, the creators of television opera and the advocates of motion picture opera both believed that their respective genres had different requirements from stage opera. Moreover, similar to the motion picture opera movement, most people agreed that the different requirements and limitation of television opera could be best accommodated through new works created specifically for the new medium.

Further similarities can be seen in a preference for opera performed in the vernacular language. Although not all American producers of television opera insisted on performing operas in English exclusively, the NBC Opera Theatre did, and this may have been a substantial part of the reason for their greater success. Here is Chotzinoff's opinion on the subject of language:

> The secret [of opera's popularity in Europe], I believe, is the absence of a language barrier in European opera houses. Since opera is nothing more or less than music drama, the unintelligibility of the libretto robs the opera of 50% of its effect on the listener.[62]

Other writers and critics also comment upon television's preference for the language of its audience, usually within the context of a broader description of the techniques and requirements of television opera. One such example is this excerpt from Graf's analysis of studio telecasting:

> For television, being a technique that stylistically lies midway between opera comique and film, stresses realism more than the traditional

---

[62] Ibid., 23.

> production of grand opera does. Consequently it favors the language of the audience ignoring the esthetic considerations of the original language, natural looks and acting rather than operatic stylization, three-dimensional sets rather than painted flats and drops; a well-rehearsed ensemble rather than brilliant, unco-ordinated stars. It prefers quality to quantity. With its most valuable technical means, the close-up, it opens unknown effects of intimate expression, and with the technical means of multiple sets, superimposition, the use of stills and films, it makes a new flexibility of staging possible.[63]

In Graf's article we can see a slightly different take on the necessity of opera in English from Chotzinoff's opinion. Graf's overall attitude towards television opera is generally positive and, like Chotzinoff, Graf identifies "the language of the audience" as an essential part of the technique of successful studio telecasting. However, although Graf indicates that the use of the vernacular language does enhance television opera, he does not see it as essentially beneficial in the same way Chotzinoff does. Of course, Graf's comment refers specifically to translated opera telecasts, but his attitude yields insight into the more general bias that Chotzinoff was responding to when he bemoaned "The uphill fight we had for opera in English! The critics all objected, every one of them, until they saw the quality of the work we were doing."[64]

As a side note, Graf's assertion that television opera translations "ignore the esthetic considerations of the original language" is unfair, at least in the case of the NBC Opera Theatre:

> Of course, we work very hard on the translations. We are careful to avoid the ridiculous locutions of the standard, printed English translations of opera librettos, and we also try to approximate vowel sounds. We have now arrived at a point where our audience […]

---

[63] Graf, "'Saving Angel' Says Met Stage Director," 138.

[64] Samuel Chotzinoff quoted in Frank Merkling, "Opera Becomes Theater Via NBC-TV," *Musical America* 77 (February 1957), 17.

> accept[s] English as naturally as the Europeans accept the language of their own operas.[65]

This description by Chotzinoff reveals a significant attention to aesthetic considerations in the translations used by the NBC Opera Theatre.

Graf's analysis of studio telecasting reveals several other considerations shared with writers from the era of motion picture opera. For example, Graf calls for "a well-rehearsed ensemble rather than brilliant, unco-ordinated stars," and comments that "with its most valuable technical means, the close-up, it [studio telecasting] opens unknown effects of intimate expression"[66] In a similar vein, Chotzinoff observes that "television cameras are merciless exposers of insincerity, exaggeration, and phoniness, as the close-up is a complete revelation of the artist."[67] Similar to the motion picture opera movement, these men believed that television operas demanded more highly developed acting techniques than their stage counterpart. To be specific, the creators and critics of television opera deemed that television opera required more realism both in acting and in casting. This opinion is clearly exhibited in Kenneth Wright's 1957 article on television and opera:

> The producer, then, must find a cast who can sing and act and look their parts. This is harder to do than in the opera-house because the intimate nature of television […] demands more subtlety in acting.[68]

Wright continues the discussion one step further, commenting not only on the acting needs of television opera but also on the unique vocal requirements. "A voice need not

---

[65] Chotzinoff, "NBC Music Chief Sees New Approach," 138.

[66] Graf, "'Saving Angel' Says Met Stage Director," 56.

[67] Chotzinoff, "NBC Music Chief Sees New Approach," 138.

[68] Wright, "Television and Opera," 10.

be Covent Garden size," he observes; "in fact a 'great' voice unless exceptionally smooth and well-controlled, is often a disadvantage in a studio."[69]

Parallels found between the discussion of motion picture opera and television opera are not limited to production concerns. Similar to Lawler's assertion that "opera music be Americanized," Chotzinoff recognized that a change was necessary in the structure of opera production and of opera appreciation:

> Whereas in the old, so called glamorous days opera was supported in the main by people who looked upon it as a social event, opera today is dependent on people who take pleasure in it.[70]

To this end many believed, as they did of motion picture opera, that television opera would generate renewed interest for opera in general and that it would attract a wider audience to stage opera. Both Graf and Wright comment on this potential:

> It [opera telecasting] promises to become the saving angel just as radio did in the 1930s when, in the days of the financial crisis, it came to the assistance of opera by creating a new and large democratic audience.[71]

> Or can it [television] build up a wave of appreciation that might bring a vast new audience to see opera in its three-dimensional setting with the proper acoustics of the theatre? I believe that it can, and will.[72]

These parallels even extend to similar discussions about reshaping the relationship between television opera and stage opera and about shaping the development of both genres. Some hoped that television opera would not only attract larger audiences to

---

[69] Ibid.

[70] Chotzinoff, "NBC Music Chief Sees New Approach," 23.

[71] Graf, "'Saving Angel' Says Met Stage Director," 22.

[72] Wright, "Television and Opera," 8.

stage opera but that it would also improve the production of stage opera. At least one person, Herbert Graf, predicted that economic considerations in the production of television opera would eventually lead to new avenues of funding for stage opera because of the mutual benefit of shared costs and resources:

> It would therefore be in the interest of a television company to subsidize a local opera company of quality in return for its permanent services for regular musical-dramatic programs.

Graf believed that television had the potential to "become one of the most important factors in the organization of new American ways of operatic sponsorship."[73]

Strengths of Television Opera and Chotzinoff's Ideal

In her overview of the history of television opera, Marcia Citron comments on the dissimilarity of stage opera and television:

> Many of the social and aesthetic characteristics of early cinema had a lot in common with opera. Television, however, arose in the mid twentieth century and depended on values of speed, convenience, and distraction, which have little in common with opera.[74]

Given this fundamental dissimilarity it is curious that opera on television, and especially operas commissioned specifically for television, faired considerably better than did their predecessor in cinema, namely motion picture opera. It is also curious that as the techniques and conventions of television began to increasingly resemble those of film, and as television operas gradually came to be indistinguishable from opera films, the success of television opera died out.

---

[73] Graf, "'Saving Angel' Says Met Stage Director," 140.

[74] Citron, *Opera on Screen*, 42.

A large part of the greater success of television opera, and especially of television operas from the 1950s and 1960s, can be attributed to the fact that these works were especially well-tailored to the specific strengths and limitations of the television medium. Many of the stylistic requirements of television have already been discussed above, because most of these attributes are shared with the cinematic medium. However, there are certain fundamental differences between television and film, especially as they existed during the heyday of television opera in the mid 20th century. The differences between television and film are also a large focus of the work of many scholars, such as Marcia Citron, who study opera on screen in its various genres and incarnations. In the introduction to *Opera on Screen*, Citrion identifies a difference between these two mediums based on scale and the consequent effects of scale on the viewer:

> For all treatments the camera creates a sense of scale that is different from live opera. The size and focus of images depends on the particular medium and its relationship with the viewer.[75]

Citron goes on to more directly address the difference between television and cinema:

> With a small screen and domestic venue, television promotes familiarity and intimacy. While cinema dominates and overwhelms the viewer, television creates an environment in which the viewer can identify with the narrative on a more equal footing.[76]

Here we have the heart of the matter. This idea of the intimacy of television, both in terms of content and viewing conditions, is an important and reoccurring consideration. As one can glean from the contemporary writings quoted previously in

---

[75] Ibid., 13.

[76] Ibid., 15.

this chapter, intimacy was frequently highlighted in discussions about television opera and opera telecasting by the contemporaneous critics and creators of television opera.

Ultimately, the success of television opera is best attributed to the creators and their excellent understanding of the genre, of the medium, and of their audience. This understanding of the craftsmanship necessary to create highly successful television operas is reflected in their writings. For example, Kenneth Wright discusses the elements that must be present in a television opera in order to engage the audience:

> All he [the general viewer] asks is a strong credible story, which he can understand; characters he can believe in, singing, enunciating, and acting in a way that convinces and moves him. Given these things, he will take every sort of modern music which in concert or on radio would puzzle and even repel him.[77]

Perhaps the person who understood television opera the best was Samuel Chotzinoff. As producer of the NBC Opera Theatre, Chotzinoff and his team lead the creation of an overwhelming majority of the most successful television operas and of many works that defined the genre. Chotzinoff envisioned television opera as a genre built around ideals of accessibility, efficient narrative development, and engaging dramatic content:

> Certainly the television opera of the future will be a more compact work than the old-fashioned opera, eliminating the waits for changes in scenery and costumes and the long intermissions for relaxation and refreshment. It will dispense with musical and dramatic padding. It will discard the extravagant and expensive scenic sets and properties and at the same time widen its dramatic horizon by the use of as many different scenes as will be found desirable. And, of course, one cannot overestimate the physical comfort enjoyed by television audiences who are not required to buy tickets or to move from their armchairs.[78]

---

[77] Wright, "Television and Opera," 10.

[78] Chotzinoff, "NBC Music Chief Sees New Approach," 138.

The most important and the most shocking components of Chotzinoff's vision for television opera were his comments on the role of music, some of which remain highly controversial even today:

> Yet it seems probable that the composers of the future, writing especially for television, will find no necessity for explanatory and illuminating solo arias, once they realized the revealing potentials of the television cameras.[79]

This quote refers only to solo arias; however, the sentiment could be extended to all of the elements that Chotzinoff early referred to as "musical and dramatic padding," such as arias, duets, and ensemble numbers. At first this seems to be a radical idea, stripping away from a genre of music-driven narrative film all of the most common forms of structured vocal music. However, one might imagine a work, featuring continuous music and sung dialogue that is composed entirely of *parlar cantando* or what the composer Gian Carlo Menotti described as "a melodic *recitativo* that does not impair the dramatic action."[80] Many of Menotti's operas use such a technique frequently, even if there are still arias and ensemble numbers incorporated throughout; this may account in part for why Menotti's operas, both originally composed for television and those adapted from the stage, were consistently amongst the most successfully produced for the screen.

The advantage of using such a *parlar cantando* style uninterrupted by isolated musical numbers, such as arias, is that this allows the opera "to unfold [according to] the dramatic pace of the libretto without ever sacrificing the melodic flow of the

---

[79] Ibid.

[80] Gian Carlo Menotti interviewed by John Ardoin, *The Stages of Menotti* (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, 1985), 37.

music."[81] In this quote, Menotti was speaking with regards to stage opera, describing what he believed should be "the ideal of every opera composer to achieve."[82] However, in the context of film and television this ideal becomes a necessity. In terms of the "buy-in" factor, films that feature continuous music and that replace all dialogue with singing are at a slight advantage because audiences either reject the music and singing outright or accept it as a natural part of the filmic presentation. However, to achieve verisimilitude in the presence of continuous music and singing on screen requires a balance between dramatic progression and musical integrity. Without this balance, there is a high risk of detracting from the audience buy-in and shattering the illusion of reality within the diegesis.

One might also interpret Chotzinoff's comments in terms of meta-diegetic music. As one potential interpretation, what Chotzinoff envisioned was essentially a film featuring continuous meta-diegetic music but no meta-diegetic scenes. Even in the absences of isolated musical numbers it is still possible to enhance emotional impact and to provide extra-diegetic information through music. Moreover, the composer and filmmakers can still employ musical devices, such as reoccurring themes and developing leitmotifs, to create a musical continuity across the whole work as well as a dramatic structure inherent to the musical structure itself. When combined with the film's other elements, the image and narrative components, this dramatic music can serve to reinforce, enhance, and even comment upon the filmic storytelling.

---

[81] Ibid.

[82] Ibid.

This scenario is not only ideal for television operas, but it is highly applicable to creating successful music-driven narrative films in general.

Several of the advantages of meta-diegetic scenes outlined in chapter two are still relevant even in the context of continuous meta-diegetic music. Meta-diegetic scenes, by virtue of their nature as a momentary suspension of diegetic reality or temporal continuity, allow the film to directly address subjects such as subjective emotional issues and character exposition and development. Also, meta-diegetic scenes can elicit strong emotional responses from the audience and are valuable as a source of entertainment. Meta-diegetic music can achieve these same functions without the suspension of temporal continuity, but not to the same degree or with the same immediacy as within a meta-diegetic scene. Therefore, it seems illogical to remove meta-diegetic scenes entirely. To preserve the balance between dramatic progression and musical integrity these meta-diegetic scenes must be very concise. Hypothetically, all music-driven narrative films could benefit from meta-diegetic scenes, provided that these are sufficiently short so as not to disrupt the dramatic progress and provided that the music, libretto, and production are constructed in such a way that these meta-diegetic scenes fit in stylistically with the rest of the film. In practice, one finds that this is exactly what Chotzinoff did.

History provides an interesting case study to examine the effectiveness of Chotzinoff's claims about television opera, in the form of two television productions based on Benjamin Britten's *Billy Budd*. On the one hand is the NBC Opera Theatre's *Scenes from Billy Budd*, broadcast in 1952 and produced by Chotzinoff. On the other hand is the BBC's 1966 television production of the complete opera.

Due to time constraints imposed on the NBC television broadcast, it was necessary to reduce the length of Britten's opera to only 90 minutes, almost an hour-and-a-half shorter than the full stage version. However, as noted by one contemporary critic, "the producer [Chotzinoff], far from regarding cuts as an evil that must be tolerated, look[ed] upon them as opportunities for tightening the action."[83] One of the most infamous changes made to the score for the NBC broadcast production was the removal of an entire aria that is considered by many a crucial moment of plot and character development: Claggert's aria, "O beauty, o handsomeness, goodness!" In defense of this cut, Chotzinoff asserts that "the omission of the aria was compensated for […] by a series of close-ups of Mr. Claggert, and the camera accomplished in a few seconds what the aria took twelve minutes to tell us."[84] Needless to say, the composer himself was not so pleased with the alterations to his work. Britten described the NBC production as "badly and desperately cut."[85]

Britten was more directly involved in the 1966 television production of *Billy Budd*, created by the BBC and featuring the complete opera. Certainly, the BBC production had many advantages over the earlier NBC production, not the least of which is fourteen years of advances in television production practices and technology. The BBC production came from an era where the two-studio system, taped pre-recording, and post-production editing had become standard practices in television

---

[83] Merkling, "Opera Becomes Theater Via NBC-TV," 17.

[84] Chotzinoff, "NBC Music Chief Sees New Approach," 138.

[85] John Culshaw, "The Making of *Owen Wingrave*," *The Times Saturday Review* (May 8, 1971), 17.

opera. The NBC *Scenes from Billy Budd* also used a two-studio system, but in 1952 this was "one of the earliest experiments" with such a technique and was "decidedly primitive," especially in comparison to two-studio system as used for BBC's *Billy Budd* in 1966.[86] Jennifer Barnes comments upon the adoption of the two-studio system and its impact on television operas from this era:

> During the 1960s, the two-studio system would replace the single studio, allowing for more elaborate sets and specialized camera work. Increasingly, these two-studio productions were taped for a later transmission date, yet this recording method preserved the atmosphere, if not the reality, of a 'live' broadcast, with singers and orchestra performing simultaneously during the performance.[87]

In addition to more advanced cameras and equipment to produce higher quality recordings and broadcasts, the production itself featured more realistic sets and a better use of space than did the NBC production. The BBC *Billy Budd* also benefited from a better cast of singers and actors, or at least better for these particular roles. For these reasons, NBC's *Scenes from Billy Budd* did not achieve as great a sense of immediacy or intimacy as the BBC production. As appraised by Jennifer Barnes, "the 1966 *Billy Budd* remains one of the finest examples of what can be accomplished in an opera production conceived specifically for television."[88]

Without contesting the validity of Barnes' assertion, a closer look at the structure and the relative merits of the 1952 production is in order. As is especially apparent in the first several scenes, but as is also true throughout the entire production,

---

[86] Barnes, *Television Opera*, 45.

[87] Ibid.

[88] Ibid., 54.

NBC's *Scenes from Billy Budd* does a remarkable job of sustaining narrative momentum and creating the impression that the action is continually moving forward throughout the opera. Some of the credit here goes to Britten, since the original stage opera itself is highly story driven and much of the music is structured to match a relatively natural timing and progression of the action. However, if Benjamin Britten's *Billy Budd* was originally composed with a pacing ideal for the stage, the cuts and changes made by Chotzinoff and his team accelerate the opera to a pacing that is verisimilar to Hollywood-style filmic mediums.

Music-driven narrative films demand a more streamlined narrative presentation than stage operas. Throughout *Scenes from Billy Budd* a few bars at a time are removed and in some cases whole scenes are even cut, trimming out any content that does not directly work towards advancing the story. Almost all of the arias that remain from the original stage opera are abridged in the NBC production. Captain Vere's aria "I accept their verdict," one of the longest aria in *Scenes from Billy Budd*, is only a few minutes of music and yet still feels out of place in terms of length, although a brief meta-diegetic scene for reflection is a welcome break at this point in the narrative. However, most of the other arias in *Scenes from Billy Budd* are even shorter and seem to be the perfect length for television. An excellent example of this is John Claggard's aria "I heard your honor." This brief meta-diegetic moment within a larger scene is one of the earliest defining moments of Claggard's character. The NBC production provides this aria with just enough time to be musically interesting and to establish the appropriate mood and character without slowing down or halting the overall narrative progression of the scene.

Of course, the cuts made for the NBC abridged production were not without their own problems. As two executives from the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, remarked after seeing *Scenes from Billy Budd* for the first time, "that's good strong drama, and good television, but of course it isn't opera."[89] While this comment is perhaps too harsh, it does highlight one of the primary issues with *Scenes from Billy Budd*: in attempting to streamline the dramatic action, the NBC production trims back the musical content to the point that it undermines some of the musical structure of the work as a whole. This larger issue manifests itself in two ways.

The first manner in which the cuts hurt overall musical structure is that some musical ideas are not given enough time or prominence to fully establish themselves. For example, the first scene after the prologue in the original opera is built largely around a motif sung by the chorus to words "ho heave, ho heave away, heave, ho heave." The "ho heave" motif plays an important role in establishing the mood of the first scene, which foreshadows and gives context to the plot. Moreover, the "heave ho" theme also establishes musical language of work as a whole and is itself an important musical motif that reoccurs through the opera. In the NBC production, this theme's appearance in the first scene is greatly reduced. Far from the clear significance and memorability afforded to this theme in the original score, viewers of NBC production not already familiar with Britten's opera are unlikely to even take notice of the "ho heave" theme. Its inclusion at all feels more like a passing reference to Britten's music, rather than an effective musical-narrative device providing a meaningful addition to the story.

---

[89] David Webster and Christopher West quoted in Wright, "Television and Opera," 12.

This leads into the second way in which the trimming down hurt the overall musical structure. In the NBC production the introduction of many of the opera's primary musical motivic ideas are either reduced or removed entirely, with the result that the later occurrences of these motifs appear to be unprompted and lacks the extra-narrative meaning acquired through repetition. This is true of the "ho heave" motif as well the "fathoms down" motif, which makes an important reappearance towards the end of Billy Budd's aria, "Look! Through the port comes the moonshine astray." In a more extreme example, the scene from act one in which Captain Veer meets with his officers is completely removed in the NBC production. In many respects, this scene parallels the court scene from act two and introduces several musical themes that are reprised by the trio of officers in the later scene. Thus, even if the story and the court scene were not directly hurt by the removal of the earlier scene, there were parts of the court scene that felt out of place because they were not set up musically in act one.

Despite these issues, the overall structure of *Scenes from Billy Budd* is very strong and provides evidence that music-driven narrative films should be streamlined works featuring a continuous narrative progression. Meta-diegetic scenes still have a place in these kinds of music-driven narrative films and can be a welcome momentary change of pace. However, such isolated musical numbers must be highly concise and serve primarily to advance either the story or character development.[90] The issues discussed in the previous three paragraphs are not indicative of structural deficiencies in the NBC's adaptation, but rather they are symptoms of condensing a larger work

---

[90] As will be discussed in chapter seven, in movie musicals isolated musical numbers can also be justified purely on the grounds of entertainment, although often they may also contribute to narrative development indirectly through structural significance.

and transferring it to a new medium. Almost all of these issues could be solved if a composer and librettist used the structure of *Scenes from Billy Budd* as a framework and constructed the story, arias, and musical content to fit within the different pacing requirement of television. Here again is strong evidence that television operas, and other music-driven narrative films, are best if they are original works conceived with specific consideration to the requirements of the screen.

Stage Affinity and Other Issues

In addition to the question of whether television operas should be originally composed or adapted from operas written for the stage, there is another related issue that plagues the history of television opera. Most operas that were commissioned for television are known today primarily as works for the stage. Moreover, almost all television operas were written with the expectation that they would exist through live performance following their initial television premiere. The prevailing attitude on the part of composers and librettists was to treat television opera commissions as an initial performance venue for works that would go on to live as stage operas. We can see this mindset in composers of television opera as early as Menotti, as exhibited in his comments about *Amahl and the Night Visitor*, the first commissioned television opera:

> I must confess that in writing "Amahl and the Night Visitors," I hardly thought of television at all. As a matter of fact, all my operas are originally conceived for an ideal stage which has no equivalent in reality […] To me, cinema, television, and radio seem rather pale substitutes for the magic of the stage. This is the reason why, in writing "Amahl and the Night Visitors", I intentionally disregarded the

> mobility of the screen and limited myself to the symbolic simplicity of the stage.[91]

Although Menotti ascribes his affinity for the stage to artistic preference, history suggests that the motivation for other television operas may have been more pragmatic. With the exception of *Amahl and the Night Visitors*, it was rare for a television opera to be shown more than once or twice on air. Therefore, if an opera commissioned for television were to live beyond its premiere, it would have to be adaptable to the stage. Given the tremendous effort involved in writing an opera, it seems only natural that composers and librettists would construct their works accordingly. However, even though such actions on the part of the studios exacerbated the situation, it is likely that such affinity of the stage can also be attributed in part to a bias amongst composers, librettists, and musicians.

The issue at hand can be generalized to a question of whether or not in a recorded medium a single component can be treated as self-contained and extractable without adversely affecting the work as a whole. In this case, is it reasonable for the composer and librettist to construct the opera intentionally in such a way that it is complete in itself and can be produced in a different medium without alteration, or must the entire film be treated as the final product and the score initially constructed with an eye only to its place within the work as a whole? Some of the bias towards score and libretto as the final product and most lasting component of an opera is implicit in Menotti's statement, but it can be seen even more clearly in a comment made by Peter Adler, music director for the NBC Opera Theatre:

---

[91] Gian-Carlo Menotti, "The Genesis of Amahl," in *Amahl and the Night Visitors* (RCA recording, 1952), 6.

> I don't believe in opera especially written for television in a way that would preclude an equally effective—or almost equally effective—performance on stage. Write a good small-scale opera … and it will be good television.[92]

This begs the question — did this bias on the part of composers and librettists impact the television operas themselves?

It seems that the composers' bias towards creating the score as a stand-alone artifact became more of an issue later in the history of television opera, as production hierarchy over time decreased the composers' control and creative input in the final product. An extreme example of this is *The Triumph of Beauty and Deceit* (1995), one of the last television operas created to date, the commissioning and production of which is examined in the final chapter of Jennifer Barnes' book *Television Opera*.[93] Here the composer's overwhelming desire for the score to exist in its own right beyond the television opera not only went directly against the stated intentions of the commission, to create works that could not be produced in a medium other than television, but also created conflict amongst the various parties involved in the production. The result is a television opera in which the libretto, score, performance, and production are each interesting and highly accomplished; however, as Barnes points out, "none of these components work to reinforce each other."[94]

The situation was less problematic early in television opera's history. As noted by Barnes, "Television initially places both the composer and the composition at the

---

[92] Peter Adler quoted in Wright, "Television and Opera," 13.

[93] Barnes, "Trial by Television," in *Television Opera*, 81–96.

[94] Ibid., 95.

apex of the production hierarchy.'[95] Thus during the first few decades of television opera's existence, when the genre was at its peak, the composers were highly involved in the entire production. This is especially true of the Menotti television operas, many of which Menotti himself directed. The composer's status as a central creative force in these television operas facilitated closer collaboration with other key individuals involved in shaping the production and, in turn, greater integration of the various production elements.

Despite how well suited most commissioned television operas from this era are to production in the television medium, the composers' eye to future stage production shows through at times. Various elements of the opera will often be constructed in a manner that harkens back to stage conventions and is not always idiomatic to screen mediums. An excellent example of this is Benjamin Britten's *Owen Wingrave* (1971), commissioned by the BBC. Although Britten did make a conscious effort to take advantage of possibilities opened up by working in a recorded medium, the sequences that make special use of camera and editing are not entirely dependent on them and could quite easily be reworked for live staging without significant alteration. Moreover, the opera's formal construction is based around scenes, arias, and dialogues that mostly take place in a single location for extended periods of time, as would be necessary for a stage production. Also, Britten's musical language is often virtuosic to the point that it obscures intelligibility of the text, turning lines of dialogue and short monologues into miniature arias that would be impressive on stage but are not as effective in a recorded, or more action driven, medium such as television. Even in the

---

[95] Ibid., 51.

production itself, scenes are often staged and filmed in such a way that creates the impression of a theatrical set and distances the audience from the characters, replicating the physical distance between audience and performers in a live stage production. At these times, the television production of *Owen Wingrave* almost feels like a recording of a theatrical production, rather than a work conceived and created specifically for a recorded screen medium. Interestingly, these kinds of issues were neither as prominent nor as frequent in the BBC television production of Benjamin Britten's *Billy Budd*.

There is one notable instance of an opera commissioned for television that has never been produced on stage because it was never intended to be performed live. In fact, it is said of Menotti's *Labyrinth* (1963) that it could not be produced on stage without considerable alteration to the original score and libretto. Initially, *Labyrinth* received a mostly negative critical reception. One contemporary critic described the opera as "one or the thinnest musical concoctions Menotti ever put together;" this critic argued that despite some "moments of imagination," "the allegory [which forms the basis of the plot] turns out to be remarkably trite" and the composition featured an "utterly conventional musical background."[96] Despite a negative appraisal of the opera itself, this same reviewer also noted that "television is capable of certain techniques, and he [Menotti] has not hesitated to make full use of them."[97] In this light, *Labyrinth* is one of the most successful television operas; *Labyrinth* takes maximum advantage of the recorded medium and the finished product feels idiomatic to television.

---

[96] Harold C. Schonberg, "Music: Menotti Opera - 'Labyrinth' on TV Is Not His Best," *The New York Times*, March 4, 1963.

[97] Ibid.

The most successful television operas are those that were originally composed for television production with specific consideration to the particular requirement and limitations of the medium. In order to take full advantage of the television medium, the composers of television operas had to work closely with other central creative individuals throughout the production. Many television operas could have been more effective if the composers and librettists viewed the final performance, recording, or telecast as the goal and final lasting artifact of their work, at least for the duration of the initial production. It is logical to assume that similar requirements apply when attempting to create original music-driven narrative films in other genres.

Chapter 6

Film Opera Adaptations

Writing in 2003, Jennifer Barnes observed that, "to date, no composer has been commissioned to write an opera for feature length film."[98] Although some people might contest this assertion, depending on how broadly they define opera as a genre and film as a medium, generally speaking original film operas still do not exist today. Of course, one could point to a handful of films that include through-composed music (such as *Les Parapluies de Cherbourg* and *Tommy*), but stylistically and historically these films fit better when treated as outliers of the movie musicals genre. Likewise, one could argue that the original television operas are operatic works created for the screen, many of which were even prerecorded and edited, and therefore qualify as film operas. However, these were created under unique circumstances and are part of a historical and stylistic lineage that separates them from the realm of film. Moreover, collectively the television operas encounter a variety of issues that, although related, are distinct from those of operas produced on film and intended for the cinema.

Despite the nonexistence of original film operas, there are several notable film adaptations of operas that were originally composed for the stage. On the whole, there is not enough continuity between these film opera adaptations to truly call them a cohesive genre of film. Each individual production takes a different approach and

---

[98] Barnes, *Television Opera*, 11.

raises a different set of issues regarding the treatment of opera in film. Therefore, the best way to study film opera adaptations is by examining them on a case-by-case basis. To this end, the later chapters of Marcia Citron's *Opera on Screen* provide an excellent look at several of the most significant film opera adaptations.[99]

There are, however, some general issues encountered by film opera adaptations overall that are particularly relevant to an understanding of how music driven narratives function in the filmic medium. The first and most prominent of these issues is that the success of these works is tied to the cultural tradition of their target audience and of the nation in which they are produced. Specifically, film opera adaptations have fared better in Europe than in the United States in part because opera is an integral part of European cultural heritage. Not only are European audiences more familiar with the works being adapted, but they are generally more accustomed to structures of opera as a genre and are more tolerant of the slower narrative progression and unrealistic elements that traditionally result from through-composition and continuous meta-diegetic music and singing. As Citron observes:

> In the United States opera has attracted audiences at least partly because it exudes a cosmopolitan flavor […] In Europe, however, opera has served as a more natural product of culture and forged bonds more easily with the public.[100]

Citron also notes that, "Hollywood favored opera in small doses, as in a scene or aria instead of a film."[101] Also, "Europeans are more willing than Americas to accept the

---

[99] Citron, *Opera on Screen*.

[100] Ibid., 21.

[101] Ibid., 32.

conventions of opera; matters of length, language, and performance style pose fewer problems for Europeans."[102] In other words, American film audience will respond to the concept of opera and the inclusion of operatic elements as a trigger for various associations that American culture has connected with opera, such as wealth, diva-level stardom, and high culture. However, because opera is not native to American culture, and because most Americans do not have direct exposure to opera, full productions of European style operas are not very well suited to most American film audiences.

Financing is also an important distinction between the American and European film industries that directly affects the viability of film opera adaptations. Again, Citron summarizes the situation:

> In the United States commercial interests have sustained visual media and the arts. In Europe Governmental support has played a major role in supporting these ventures.[103]

The result is that in order for film opera adaptations to be produced in the United States, they must be commercially viable enough to support themselves economically and to be profitable. In Europe, on the other hand, governmental subsidized filmmaking frees filmmakers from the need to generate a profit and, by extension, from the demands of having to cater to a mass market of the general public. Therefore, film opera adaptations in Europe can be produced for purely artistic reasons or, more commonly, because they support a social or cultural agenda. More recently, film opera adaptations have found a wider market in the United States through specialized cable

---

[102] Ibid., 50.

[103] Ibid., 21.

stations and through home video distribution. However, this market is still not large enough to encourage a significant mainstream increase in film opera production.

One other issue frequently encountered in film opera adaptations, though not as prevalent as cultural differences, is a problem of stage affinity, not unlike that encountered in television opera. Beyond the structure of the operas themselves, which were devised for the stage and therefore carry this quality with them into their filmic adaptations, many film opera adaptations make heavy use of production elements that are indicative of the stage. These elements in many film opera adaptations create an emotional distance between the characters and the audience, working contrary to the intimacy that is characteristic of Hollywood-style narrative film. In some cases, there is not only an emotional distance, but the positioning of the camera relative to the action literally mimics the physical distance between an audience and the actors on a proscenium stage. Thus, as a whole, many film opera adaptations are unsuccessful in achieving the impression of being cinematic. Although many of these adaptations employ innovative techniques to produce interesting effects that could not be recreated on stage, they are never able to fully break away from their stage origins and adapt themselves to the idiomatic qualities and expectations of the filmic medium.

Chapter 7

Movie Musicals and Rock Operas

Movie Musicals

Movie musicals as a whole have been more successful in adapting to the idiomatic requirements of the filmic medium than almost any other genre of music-driven narrative film. One of the oldest and most important genres of Hollywood film, movie musicals consists of works originally created as films as well as adaptations of stage musicals. One of the interesting things about movie musicals is that both varieties, original and adapted, seem to be naturally cinematic. This is not to say that all movie musicals are verisimilar or have stood up against changing public taste, but historically movie musicals have achieved greater and more widespread popularity and have proved more commercially viable than other genres of music driven narrative film. This begs the question, why are movie musicals seemingly better suited, or at least more easily adapted, to the filmic medium? The answer to this question lies in the musical's formal structure and how this structure supports the "buy-in factor."

In his book, *The American Film Musical*, Rick Altman proposes a definition for movie musicals as a genre that is based on a variety of semantic and syntactic characteristic.[104] In a very general sense, these characteristics all work to support this

---

[104] Altman, *The American Film Musical*, 110.

genre's primary thematic concern; the prototypical movie musical establishes an opposition between the male and female leads that is eventually resolved through their marriage or other form of coming together at the end of the film, which is paralleled by a secondary dichotomy between conflicting set of cultural values that ultimately also is resolved ritualistically through the marriage of the male and female ingénues. For purposes of the discussion at hand, however, this thesis is less concerned with the general thematic content of movie musicals and instead is more interested specifically in the component of the definition that Altman refers to as "Image/Sound":

> The traditional classical narrative hierarchy of image over sound is reversed at the climactic moments of the musical. In fact this reversal is commonly the agent which permits the establishment of continuity between sequences stressing realistic movement and sound and those which tie movement and sound to a rhythmic source.[105]

These moments of reversed hierarchy are, of course, song and dance numbers. The reversal that Altman refers to is not a single event, but rather it happens repeatedly throughout the course of a given movie musical. As Altman says in describing the "length" requirement of his definition:

> Without the leisure to move in and out of song numbers repeatedly, a film lacks the opportunity to develop the relationships characteristic of the musical as a narrative genre.[106]

To summarize, the structure of a movie musical is based on an oscillation between scenes that feature a realistic diegetic presentation, as is standard in most traditional narrative films, and scenes which allow for an unrealistic use of music and

---

[105] Ibid., 109–110.

[106] Ibid., 103.

rhythmically organized motion. In Altman's analysis the difference between realistic scenes and musical numbers is defined primarily by whether or not the action, and especially the visual image, follows a rhythmic organization, implying that this rhythm derives from the highly organized nature of music.

Another way to understand the structure of a movie musical is through a three core-aspects analysis. The structure of a movie musical oscillates between realistic scenes in which the narrative aspect is much stronger than the sound aspect, and musical numbers in which the sound aspect is stronger than the narrative aspect. The image aspect also fluctuates in importance, usually in correlation with the sound aspect; i.e. image will usually be given greater importance in the balance of the three core-aspects during song and dance numbers, especially dance numbers.

This definition of movie musicals excludes the possibility of all three core-aspects having equal importance throughout a given film. However, if one averages the importance of each aspect throughout the film, a theoretically ideal movie musical will have an equal balance of the three core-aspects overall, as a result of the oscillation, even if such a balance cannot be observed at any specific point throughout the film itself. In practice, the averaged balance of the three core-aspects is not perfect in all movie musicals, but in most cases the balance is about equal or is slightly offset to an overall balance that is stylistically appropriate to the genre and the thematic content of the specific film.

Coming back to the original question, it is precisely this oscillation between realistic narrative scenes and musical numbers that allows movie musicals to adapt themselves so effectively to the filmic medium. Most song and dance sequences in movie musicals are in fact meta-diegetic scenes. They are momentary suspensions of

temporal and/or realistic continuity that interrupt, and are therefore separate from, a series of intermittent scenes that feature a realistic diegetic presentation. The intermittent scenes usually drive most of the narrative progression. As explained previously, "buy-in" is a key factor of whether or not an audience accepts the meta-diegetic elements of a music-driven narrative film. A continual oscillation between realistic diegetic presentation and meta-diegetic scenes at first appears to pose a greater challenge, than through-composed works, which benefit from only requiring a single act of "total buy-in;" the audience must reaccept and buy into the unrealistic meta-dietetic presentation repeatedly throughout the film. However, because the meta-diegetic scenes in movie musicals are structurally self-contained, they can be treated as isolated moments of entertainment. Although a good movie musical will take advantage of the other strengths of the meta-diegetic elements, the audience is more willing to accept the stylized and inherently unrealistic nature of meta-diegetic music and other meta-diegetic elements when the primary function of meta-diegetic scenes is ostensibly entertainment.

This structure has a very interesting effect on the content of the majority of movie musicals. Since the meta-diegetic scenes in movie musicals most naturally function as isolated moments of entertainment, this entertainment becomes the primary function of the entire film. Thus a typical movie musical could be read as a series of entertaining meta-diegetic scenes, with a narrative and parallel series of realistic diegetic scenes that serve primarily to link together and provide continuity between the meta-diegetic scenes. The importance of entertainment in facilitating the structure of the movie musical historically has resulted in the genre's almost obsessive use of entertainment as reoccurring central theme:

> In an important sense, the American film musical constitutes an apology for its own existence: by setting up the work/entertainment polarity in such a way as to demonstrate the incomplete and potentially destructive nature of work […] as well as the desirable qualities of entertainment, the musical justifies its own existence.[107]

Movie musicals as a genre are very self-consciously aware that the value of entertainment is integrally important to the success of their structure as well as the validity of their existence. Therefore, most movie musicals deal with themes that demonstrate the importance of entertainment, thereby validating the social institution that most directly supports the existence and success of the movie musical genre.

Rock Opera Films

There are several films that by colloquial definition are frequently lumped together with movie musicals, despite the fact that these films do not fit the structure described above and, more generally, do not match the semantic and semiotic characters described in Altman's definition of the traditional Hollywood film musical. These are the outliers mentioned towards the end of chapter six. The majority of these films have enough significant structural similarities that they can be talked about as a genre. This thesis refer to these as "rock opera films," in recognition of the stage works and concept albums from which the most notable rock opera films were adapted.

The basic structure of a rock opera film is similar to that of a movie musical in that it is primarily based on a series of structurally self-contained musical numbers. There are, however, a number of distinctions, the most significant of which is that rock operas do not include the intermittent scenes with realistic diegetic presentations. In

---

[107] Ibid., 51.

other words, a rock opera film is a through-composed work consisting of a continuous series of meta-diegetic scenes. The removal of the realist diegetic scenes, of course, also renders impossible the characteristic oscillation between realistic and meta-diegetic scenes that defines the structure of the movie musical. The effect of this is that the narrative in rock operas must carry through musical numbers. This also means that the meta-diegetic scenes in rock operas are treated less as moments of pure entertainment. Another significant difference between rock operas and movie musicals is that rock operas tend to follow a more traditional linear narrative centered primarily on a single character, as opposed to the dual-focus narrative that Altman observes in traditional movie musicals. Again, this difference is partially derived from differences in structure as a result of the removal of the oscillation between realistic diegetic scenes and meta-diegetic scenes.

The structure of a typical rock opera film can be traced back to the historical development of the genre's formative works, especially The Who's *Tommy* (1975) and Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Jesus Christ Superstar* (1973). Both of these rock opera films began as concept albums. They were recorded collections of songs written and organized around a loosely defined story concept. When adapted to film, the loosely defined narratives of each rock opera, implied in songs themselves, were clarified and made specific and concrete by the visuals.

Looking at rock opera films in terms of three core-aspects model, this is one of the few genres where sound, image, and narrative are consistently treated with almost equal importance throughout the entirety of any given film. This balance is achieved because the music numbers are the central organizing structure of the rock opera, foregrounding the sound aspect, because the story structure that organizes these

individual musical numbers stresses the importance of narrative, and because the function of visuals in clarifying the narrative effectively raises both the narrative and image aspects to the same forefront as the sound aspect. However, rock operas still do not meet the hypothesized ideal of the three core-aspect model because they lack a synergistic interplay of the three core aspects. Although sound, image, and narrative in a rock opera may be treated equally, they still function as relatively independent elements. Perhaps it is more accurate to say that any pair of the three core-aspects may be closely intertwined, but all three do not necessary depend on each other. This is especially true of the relationship between image and sound. Although there are times when sound and image function referential with one another, such as a sequence in which the image and movement follow the rhythmic organization of the music, most often the connection between image and sound seems to be more the indirect result of close interaction of each with narrative.

Then again, even in case of sound and narrative the interrelation is not always very strong. Image and narrative in rock operas are closely tied because of the integral role image plays in clarifying the narrative. However, in practice image and narrative often do not seem dependent on each other, since the musical numbers themselves usual can function strongly outside of the context of the image or narrative and the effectiveness of the songs themselves is not significantly diminished by the absence of image and narrative.

All that being said, rock opera films have more closely approached the ideal balance of sound, image, and narrative than most other genres of music-driven narrative film. Also, some recent rock opera films, such as *Evita* (1996) and *Repo! The Genetic Opera* (2010), have achieved a closer integration of these three core-aspects.

CONCLUSIONS

In studying the existing genres of music-driven narrative film it becomes apparent that, even within a single cultural tradition, there is no single formula to effectively combine vocal music and cinematic storytelling in filmic mediums. For example, the comparison of the NBC *Scenes from Billy Budd* (1952) and the BBC *Billy Budd* (1966) demonstrates that different treatments of similar content may both be effective, even though comparatively each treatment may include some elements that seem more idiomatic to filmic mediums than the other. In *Scenes from Billy Budd*, the abridged libretto allowed for an accelerated narrative pacing and shorter meta-diegetic solo vocal numbers, which aligned better with the expected flow of narrative progression in Hollywood-style film and television, even though some of the overall musical structure suffered. In *Billy Budd*, the narrative pacing and long solo vocal numbers created a slower narrative development than would usually be acceptable in Hollywood-style film and television. However, the overall production quality was better, the dramatic and musical performances were more captivating, and musical development across the entire score felt more intact and less rushed.

A similar comparison of the movie musical and rock opera genres reveals that films with different balances of the three core aspects may be equally effective. In movie musicals, an alternation between realistic diegetic scenes and unrealistic meta-diegetic musical numbers produces an oscillation between scenes in which the narrative aspect is stronger than the sound and image aspects and scenes in which the sound and image aspects are stronger than the narrative aspect. In rock operas, there is

an almost equal treatment of sound, image, and narrative throughout the entire film. In both cases, the structural isolation of individual musical numbers allows for a visual and narrative treatment that is effective on screen and facilitates acceptance of the unrealistic nature of these meta-diegetic scenes.

There is at least one major reoccurring theme across these analyses. In order to achieve maximum effectiveness in the context of a Hollywood-style film tradition, music-driven narrative films must be originally conceived and produced for the screen. This should come as no surprise, given the argument set forward in the introduction to this thesis that filmic mediums are fundamentally different from stage mediums. Individuals associated with the motion picture opera movement, such as George Antheil, called for original film opera, citing that "the conception of stage-opera music is bound to be different from what film opera music must be."[108] In the television opera movement, there was some debate as to whether or not works had to be originally composed for television or if stage operas of a certain scale could be equally effective on screen. Chotzinoff believed that cameras had a revealing potential that would change the way composers and librettists constructed operas for television.[109] In practice, much of the effectiveness of NBC's television opera *Scenes from Billy Budd* derives from the extensive cuts made to the libretto for the television adaptation; the problems in *Scenes from Billy Budd* related to overall musical structure could have been corrected if the score were originally composed to match the accelerated dramatic pacing of the abridged libretto. Similarly, one of the main

---

[108] Antheil, "On the Hollywood Front," 48.

[109] Samuel Chotzinoff, "What About Televsion Opera? Two Views: NBC Music Chief Sees New Approach," *Musical America* 73 (February 1953): 138.

reasons that most film opera adaptations are not effective in the context of a Hollywood-style film tradition is that the narrative and musical structure of these films, as well as many production elements, are indicative of the stage. Although many movie musicals and rock operas are adaptations of stage musicals or concept albums, the structures of these genres, especially the structural isolation of the individual musical numbers, is well suited to film adaptation. Moreover, the film version of adapted movie musicals often appears to be very different from the stage version, because of realistic settings and slight alterations to script. Also, the addition of image in rock operas adds a new dimension and a more fully developed narrative than is present in the original concept albums.

The first half of this thesis demonstrated two theoretical frameworks to help analyze the relationship between vocal music and cinematic storytelling. In the second half of this thesis, application of the three core-aspects framework was limited primarily to movie musicals and rock operas. This is because the films in these two genres have a consistent structure that can be analyzed using the three-core aspects framework, more so than other genres of music driven narrative film. Moreover, the structural isolation of individual musical numbers in movie musicals and rock opera s facilitates identification of meta-diegetic scenes and a straightforward analysis of the relative balance between sound, image, and narrative in these scenes. Since a specific balance or structure of sound, image, and narrative is not implicit in the definition of other genres of music-driven narrative film, analysis using the three-core aspects frameworks within these other genres would have to be conducted on a case by case basis with individual films.

Observing the general application of the three core-aspects framework across the existing genres of music-driven narrative film, especially movie musicals and rock opera, there seems to be something missing. Perhaps there is an, as of yet, unexplored genre of music-driven narrative film that fully satisfies the hypothetical ideal balance of sound, image, and narrative as described in chapter one of this thesis. The movie musical genre features a shifting balance of sound, image, and narrative with an average equal balance overall. The rock opera genre features a continual equal balance of the three core-aspects, as well as a structural isolation of individual musical numbers. Perhaps the unexplored genre of music-driven narrative film would feature an equal balance of sound, image, and narrative throughout a given film and structurally would feature a continuous progression instead of a series of isolated musical numbers. Films in such a genre would most likely be through-composed, although some spoken dialogue might be acceptable. Ideally, removing the structural isolation of individual musical numbers would facilitate a closer interaction of individual musical numbers as well as fundamentally-linked interplay of vocal music and cinematic storytelling.

REFERENCES

Abbate, Carolyn. "Analysis." *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*. *Grove Music Online*. *Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed May 27, 2014, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/O008410.

Abbate, Carolyn, and Roger Parker. *A History of Opera*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2012.

Abbate, Carolyn, Roger Parker, and Cornell Verdi-Wagner Conference, eds. *Analyzing Opera: Verdi and Wagner*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989.

Adlington, Robert. "Music Theatre since the 1960s." In *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century Opera*, edited by Mervyn Cooke, 225–43. Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Altman, Rick. *The American Film Musical*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987.

Antheil, George. "On the Hollywood Front." *Modern Music* 14, no. 2 (1936): 48.

Ardoin, John. "Operatic Shadows." *The Opera Quarterly* 6, no. 1 (September 21, 1988): 52–72. doi:10.1093/oq/6.1.52.

———. *The Stages of Menotti*. Garden City: Doubleday & Company, 1985.

Banfield, Stephen. "Popular Musical Theatre (and Film)." In *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century Opera*, edited by Mervyn Cooke, 291–305. Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Barnes, Jennifer. *Television Opera: The Fall of Opera Commissioned for Television*. Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2003.

Berger, Karol. "Diegesis and Mimesis: The Poetic Modes and the Matter of Artistic Presentation." *The Journal of Musicology* 12, no. 4 (Autumn 1994): 407–33. doi:10.2307/763970.

Buhler, James. “Star Wars, Music, and Myth.” In *Music and Cinema*, 33–57. Hanover: University Press of New England, 2000.

Buhler, James, Caryl Flinn, and David Neumeyer, eds. *Music and Cinema*. 1st edition. Hanover, NH: Wesleyan, 2000.

Bunia, Remigius. “Diegesis and Representation: Beyond the Fictional World, on the Margins of Story and Narrative.” *Poetics Today* 31, no. 4 (Winter 2010): 679–720. doi:10.1215/03335372-2010-010.

Chion, Michel. *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*. Translated by Claudia Gorbman. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.

———. *The Voice in Cinema*. Translated by Claudia Gorbman. Columbia University Press, 1999.

Chotzinoff, Samuel. “What About Televsion Opera? Two Views: NBC Music Chief Sees New Approach.” *Musical America* 73 (February 1953): 23, 138.

Citron, Marcia J. *Opera on Screen*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000.

———. “The Elusive Voice: Absence and Presence in Jean-Pierre Ponnelle’s Film Le Nozze Di Figaro.” In *Between Opera and Cinema*, edited by Rose Theresa and Jeongwon Joe, 133–54. New York: Routledge, 2001.

———. *When Opera Meets Film*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

Cooke, Mervyn. “Opera and Film.” In *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century Opera*, 267–90, 2005.

Culshaw, John. “The Making of Owen Wingrave.” *The Times Saturday Review*. May 8, 1971. The Times Digital Archive.

Fleeger, Jennifer. “Projecting an Aria, Singing the Cinema: In Search of a Shared Vocabulary for Opera and Film Studies.” *Collected Work: The Future of Sound Studies. (AN: 2008-09720).* 2, no. 2 (2008): 121–25.

Franklin, Peter. “Movies as Opera: Behind the Great Devide.” In *A Night in at the Opera: Media Representations of Opera*, edited by Jeremy Tambling, 71–112. Indiana University Press, 1994.

Gorbam, Claudia. *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music*. Bloominton: Indiana University Press, 1987.

Graf, Herbert. “What About Televsion Opera? Two Views: ‘Saving Angel’ Says Met Stage Director.” *Musical America* 73 (February 1953): 22, 138, & 140.

Grant, Barry Keith. *The Hollywood Film Musical*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012.

Groos, Arthur, and Roger Parker, eds. *Reading Opera*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988.

Gruber, Paul, ed. *The Metropolitan Opera Guide to Opera on Video*. New York: Metropolitan Opera Guild : W.W. Norton, 1997.

Knapp, Raymond. The American Musical and the Performance of Personal Identity. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006.

Kerman, Joseph. Opera as Drama. Fiftieth Anniversary edition. University of California Press, 2005.

Lawler, Harrison. “Opera on the Screen.” The Etude 34, no. 5 (May 1936): 283–84.

Menotti, Gian-Carlo. “The Genesis of Amahl.” In Amahl and the Night Visitors, 5–7. RCA recording, 1952.

Merkling, Frank. “Opera Becomes Theater Via NBC-TV.” *Musical America* 77 (February 1957): 16–17.

Morris, Christopher. “Digital Diva: Opera on Video.” *The Opera Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (2010): 96–119. doi:10.1093/oq/kbq002.

Mulvey, Laura. “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.” *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*. Eds. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen. New York: Oxford UP, 1999: 833-44.

Neumeyer, David. “Diegetic/Nondiegetic: A Theoretical Model.” *Music and the Moving Image* 2, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 26–39.

Paulin, Scott D. “Richard Wagner and the Fantasy of Cinematic Unity: The Idea of the Gesamtkunstwerk in the History and Theory of Film Music.” In *Music and Cinema*, 58–84. Hanover: University Press of New England, 2000.

Payne, Anthony. “Stravinsky’s ‘The Flood.’” *Tempo*, no. 70 (Autumn 1964): 2–8.

Payne, Nicholas. “Opera in the Marketplace.” In *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century Opera*, edited by Mervyn Cooke, 306–20. Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Percheron, Daniel, and Marcia Butzel. “Sound in Cinema and Its Relationship to Image and Diegesis.” *Yale French Studies*, no. 60 (1980): 16–23. doi:10.2307/2930001.

Rubin, Marhorie. “N.B.C. Opera Company Operns Season Today With Menotti’s Symbolic ‘Labyrinth.’” *New*. November 24, 1963.

Schonberg, Harold C. “Music: Menotti Opera - ‘Labyrinth’ on TV Is Not His Best.” *The New York Times*. March 4, 1963.

Smith, Jeff. “Bridging the Gap: Reconsidering the Border between Diegetic and Nondiegetic Music.” *Music and the Moving Image* 2, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 1–25.

Sternfeld, Jessica. *The Megamusical*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006.

Sutcliffe, Tom. “Technology and Interpretation: Aspects of ‘Modernism.’” In *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century Opera*, edited by Mervyn Cooke, 321–40. Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Tambling, Jeremy, ed. *A Night in at the Opera: Media Representations of Opera*. Indiana University Press, 1994.

———. *Opera, Ideology, and Film*. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1987.

“Television Opera.” *Tempo*, no. 70 (Autumn 1964): 1.

Theresa, Rose, and Jeongwon Joe, eds. *Between Opera and Cinema*. New York: Routledge, 2001.

Winters, Ben. “The Non-Diegetic Fallacy: Film, Music, and Narrative Space.” *Music and Letters* 91, no. 2 (May 2010): 224–44. doi:10.1093/ml/gcq019.

Wright, Kenneth A. “Television and Opera.” *Tempo*, no. 45 (Autumn 1957): 8–18.

FILMS CITED

Bousman, Darren Lynn. *Repo! The Genetic Opera*. 2008.

Browning, Kirk. *Labyrinth*. 1962.

———. *Scenes from Billy Budd*. 1952.

Browning, Kirk, and Gian Carlo Menotti. *Amahl and the Night Visitors*. 1951.

Clair, René. *Le Million*. 1931.

Coleman, Basil. *Billy Budd*. 1966.

Crosland, Alan. *The Jazz Singer*. 1927.

Czerny, Ludwig. *Jenseits Des Stromes*. 1922.

Demy, Jacques. *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg*. 1964.

Feher, Friedrich. *The Robber Symphony*. 1937.

Hooper, Tom. *Les Misérables*. 2012.

Jewison, Norman. *Jesus Christ Superstar*. 1973.

Marshall, Rob. *Chicago*. 2003.

Menotti, Gian Carlo. *The Medium*. 1951.

Minnelli, Vincente. *An American in Paris*. 1951.

———. *The Band Wagon*. 1953.

Owen Wingrave. 1971.

Parker, Alan. *Evita*. 1997.

Robbins, Jerome, and Robert Wise. *West Side Story*. 1961.

Russell, Ken. *Tommy*. 1975.

Schumacher, Joel. *The Phantom of the Opera*. 2004.

The Flood. 1962.

The Triumph of Beauty and Deceit, 1995.

Wright, Joe. *Pride & Prejudice*. 2005.