

Film Sound and Film Music

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Office hours: Tuesday 9-12 or by appointment.

Basics: This seminar is an introduction to music in movies from the late 1920s to the 1960s, the era in which soundtrack film music was invented and codified. We consider techniques of film sound, how music works in conjunction with action and image, and review important technological issues related to music and sound production, recording, and synchronization. You do not need to read music for this course, since we deal with film music on an aural basis, not from written scores. Be ready to listen with attentiveness, and be prepared to find words to describe what you are hearing.

Come in to see me during office hours – I like to hear from you, and get to know why you are interested in movies.

There are two books to buy for the seminar: David Neumeyer, James Buhler, and, Rob Deemer, *Hearing the Movies: Music and Sound in Film History* (NBD); and Michel Chion, *Film: A Sound Art*. Additional readings are available as pdf files on the course website.

Schedule note: Our first seminar meeting is September 7.

The HD Call to Arms: Monday nights 7-9pm are reserved for screening film assignments on a big screen with a high-level sound system. While we will not be having a formal screening every Monday during the semester – the schedule is given below with the weekly assignments – you are required to attend scheduled screenings. If you watch a movie sub-optimally (on a tiny screen, with low sound quality), the movie will remain partially invisible and inaudible to you. There are DVDs for all the films we discuss on reserve in the Music Library, where you can borrow them to view or re-view in a small room there, or on your computer with headphones in the library. Many of the films are available to rent on Amazon for HD streaming (rental cost is minimal). Please alert me early to any conflicts with the screening schedule – the backup options are many.

Weekly assigned readings and viewings: You must complete these before seminar on Wednesday. Be prepared to comment and participate in discussions. For most weeks after the first seminar, I will ask a pair of students to collaborate in advance as co-facilitators, taking responsibility for starting off our discussion by choosing some acoustic or musical passage in the film we viewed, or some aspect of the readings, that strikes them as interesting or puzzling or amazing. With 12 people in our class, this task will circulate around multiple times.

Required written work:

- An 8-10 page paper on the sound/music in Jean Renoir's *Le Grand Illusion* (1937), due October 5. Specific instructions for this assignment will be given out in class. The DVD will be on reserve. In writing an essay on a film, you

need to be able to go back and watch many things multiple times. The movie can be rented (\$3.99 for 48 hours) or purchased for HD streaming on Amazon.

- A brief review of the music/sound design in a movie in current theatrical release in fall 2016. Here you are assuming the role of a critic for a journal or serious magazine (think: *The New Yorker*), and you should write in that mode. You will need to take a notebook and pen to an actual movie theater and take notes in the dark. Many cinemas in Boston are easy to get to by public transport, and we will take a field trip to a multiplex on November 12 (Saturday); all are welcome to participate but this is not mandatory. This assignment is due November 22.
- The final project, due December 7. You have the option of writing a final paper (12-15 pages) on a topic of your choice. You can also choose to do a creative project, either on your own or collaborating with others in the seminar. This could involve writing or designing music for a short pre-existing film excerpt, examples of this would be live-performing music for a silent film, or adding music to a short film scene that has none in the original. Another project could be to edit a pre-existing film, or creating an animation, to illustrate an existing musical piece (as was done with movies like Disney's *Fantasia*). You could also write and produce a short film complete with sound and music from the ground up. Just be aware that the project option, even making something as short as a 10-minute film, involves extensive work, performing, recording, editing, and mixing, and familiarity with the technologies help a lot here. Our final seminar meeting will be a screening of student projects.
- **House rules:** No laptops or mobile phones may be used during the seminar. Assignment extensions are granted only in emergency and serious illness cases. Written work should be submitted by email by midnight on the due date. I prefer Word files so that I can write comments into the paper.

SCHEDULE September 7. Introduction Many of the basics reviewed in this class are discussed in NBD, 65-80; and in Chion, 407- 413. Chion's book also has a glossary of film-sound concepts (many of which he himself codified).

September 14. Silent film and the transition to synchronized sound

The Phantom of the Opera (US 1925, directed by Rupert Julian; multiple scores have been written for this film), and The Jazz Singer (US 1927, directed by Alan Crosland, original music by Louis Silvers)

Screening: excerpts from *Phantom of the Opera* and *The Jazz Singer*, 9/12

NBD, 278-299 (“Transition to Sound Film”)

Chion, 31-56 (“The Birth of Talkies, or of Sound Film?”)

September 21. Radical European approaches to sound and music

Le Million (France 1931, directed by René Clair, original music by Armand Bernard, Philippe Parès, Georges Van Parys)

Screening: *Le million*, 9/19

NBD, 299-307 (on Musicals, etc.)

Chion, 201-218 (“The Disappointed Fairies Around the Cradle”)

Charles O’Brien, *Cinema’s Conversion to Sound: Technology and Film Style in France and the U.S.*, pp. 64-81 (pdf)

September 28: Classic Hollywood soundtracks—Leitmotif and Rendered Sound

The Informer (US 1935, directed by John Ford, original music by Max Steiner)

The Informer. No screening for this film; view *The Informer* via Amazon streaming, or at the Music Library via the DVD on reserve

NBD, 308-322 (technology of the soundtrack), and 85-88 (on Mickey-Mousing)

Chion, 422-423 (on Mickey-Mousing)

Kalinak, “Every Character Should Have a Theme: *The Informer*” (pdf file)

October 5. Music and fantasy

The Thief of Baghdad (UK 1940, directed by Ludwig Berger, Michael Powell, and Tim Whelan; music by Miklos Rosza)

Screening: *The Thief of Baghdad*, 10/3

NBD, 205-210 (“Location and Stereotype”)

Carolyn Abbate, “Wagner, Cinema, and Redemptive Glee” (pdf)

Paper on *Grand Illusion* is due today

October 12. Your Favorites

Six seminar members will bring in their favorite moments in film music or sound, anything from the dawn of film to right now. You can volunteer to present something by

emailing Professor Abbate with your plan by Friday October 7. If there are more than six volunteers, I will choose from the group to get a good range of examples. If there are fewer, I will add more great moments of my own.

October 19: Classic Hollywood soundtracks—monothematic scores and *noir* aesthetics: *Laura* (US 1944, directed by Otto Preminger, music by David Raksin)

Screening: *Laura*, 10/17

Kalinak “Not Exactly Classical, but Sweet” (pdf)

Cooke, “*Film noir* and the music of psychological drama” (pdf)

Chion, 79-82 (on *Laura*) and 272-274 (“The Decisive Moment,” on real time and the silence of music)

October 26: “Composed film” and post-war soundtrack aesthetics. *Black Narcissus* (UK 1947, directed by Michael Powell, music by Brian Easdale)

Screening: *Black Narcissus*, 10/24

Michael Powell, *A Life in Movies*, 573-586 (on the making of *Black Narcissus*, pdf)

Chion, 237-245 (“The Real and the Rendered”)

October 31 (class will be held Monday 7-9pm): The Hollywood movie musical. *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers* (US 1952, directed by Stanley Donen, songs by Johnny Mercer and Gene DePaul, soundtrack music by Adolph Deutsch and Conrad Salinger)

No screening for this film; view *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers* via Amazon streaming, or at the Music Library via the DVD on reserve

Plutarch, “The Abduction of the Sabine Women” (pdf)

Benet, short story “The Sobbin’ Women” (pdf)

NBD 325-335 (production phases in sound recording, “pre-scoring”)

Excerpts from Robert Altman, *The American Film Musical* (pdf)

November 9. Music and the irrational. *Vertigo* (US 1958, directed by Alfred Hitchcock, music by Bernard Hermann)

Screening: *Vertigo*, 11/7, 6.30pm [with dinner]

David Cooper, “Bernard Hermann’s *Vertigo*: A Film Score Handbook” (pdf)

Alex Ross’s discussion of *Vertigo* on his blog:

<http://www.therestisnoise.com/2006/07/vertigo.html>

November 16. Horror, Irony and anempathy via music. *Eyes Without a Face* (1959, directed by Georges Franju, score by Maurice Jarre)

No Monday screening for *Eyes without a Face*: please view individually via the DVD on reserve, Amazon streaming.

Chion, 430-435 (on anempathy)

Chion, *Sound on Screen* pp. 8-12 (pdf file)

FILM REVIEW IS DUE NOVEMBER 22

November 23. No Class – Thanksgiving Break

November 30. The 1960s. We are going to look at short scenes from several movies: *Dr. Strangelove* (UK 1964, directed by Stanley Kubrick, music by Laurie Johnson); *For a Few Dollars More* (Italy 1965, directed by Sergio Leone, music by Ennio Morricone); *The Naked Kiss* (US 1964, directed by Sam Fuller, music by Paul Dunlap); *Jules et Jim* (France 1962, directed by François Truffaut, music by Georges Delerue); *Fantastic Voyage* (US 1966, directed by Richard Fleischer, music by Leonard Rosenman)

Screening of the scenes: 11/28, 7pm [please note: dessert only for this screening session]

December 7: Student Project Presentations

Final paper due December 7

Seminar dinner celebration, December 8th at 6.30pm, at Professor Abbate's house, 75 Langdon Street in Cambridge. About 8 minutes' walk from the Music Building:

